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An Analysis of Slave Abolitionists in the North-West of England

by

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degree of
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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of slave abolitionists in Liverpool and Manchester and their shared hinterland of South Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales from 1787 to 1834. The changing economic and social structures of the region provide a backdrop to consider activities during the campaign against the slave trade up to its abolition in 1807, and the campaign for emancipation, which achieved success in 1834.

The thesis uses existing theories of economic decline and economic sacrifice to explain Britain's abandoning of the slave system as a starting point. However, these theories do not fully explain the abolition of slavery and therefore the thesis explores the complex interplay of commercial, religious and political interests in the region in an attempt to gain a clearer picture of the forces at work, which motivated protagonists' activities. The region was extremely important to the slave system and this centrality is mirrored by its importance in driving the abolitionist campaigns. The port of Liverpool was the centre of the slave trade from the middle of the eighteenth century and the import and export conduit for slave-grown raw materials and the finished goods made from them. Similarly, Mancunian industrial produce was reliant on slave-grown cotton and finished cotton goods were increasingly used for purchasing slaves on the first leg of the triangular trade from the latter third of the eighteenth century.

The thesis contextualises the campaigns against the slave trade and the institution of slavery within the rapidly industrialising landscape of the region. This industrialisation ushered in a new local social and economic élite: the industrial middle class, who would assume political influence to match their economic power, with the reform of Parliament in 1833. This reform enfranchised the bulk of middle-class Nonconformist Protestants, who constituted a large number of the anti-slavery movement. This study shows that it was appeals to the interests of the new élite that carried most weight, helping bring about the sea change in British public opinion, which led to Parliament abolishing the slave trade and emancipating the slaves.

An examination of important abolitionists' activities in the region illustrates how the anti-slavery movement framed their arguments. These arguments tied together religious and economic concerns within a broader political framework, which reflected the growing importance of *laissez faire* economic philosophy and the declining influence of traditional power brokers. In this light, it is interesting to consider the arguments forwarded by abolitionists who fell outside of this industrial, Dissenting, disenfranchised group to illustrate how their concerns differed. The study recognises that opposing political paradigms could be used to underpin arguments against slavery and how the issue of slavery also divided protagonists who broadly shared similar political positions.

By considering the changing political and economic picture in Liverpool, Manchester and their hinterland alongside case studies of important individuals, this thesis provides a clearer understanding of the role of the two cities in the anti-slavery campaigns, especially that of Liverpool, which has traditionally been underplayed and misunderstood. Further, it underlines the largely underestimated importance James Cropper's practical and philosophical contribution to the regional and national anti-slavery movement. While this study makes no claim to settle the question of the motivation for Britain's withdrawal from the slave system in her New World colonies, it does point out the gaps in existing understanding and provides a clearer picture of the slavery debate's complex nature in the region, against a similarly complex and changing social, political and economic background.

An Analysis of Slave Abolitionists in the North West of England

Chapter 1.

Introduction

This thesis explores the activities of slave abolitionists in the cities of Liverpool and Manchester, and their (shared) hinterlands. By examining the approaches adopted by these individuals and small groups, the study aims to discover their disparate motives and help gain a clearer understanding of the extent to which the abolitionists' activities contributed to Britain's outlawing of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807 and emancipation of slaves in the British colonies in 1834. There is a traditional view that Liverpool was a dangerous place for anti-slavery campaigners, which explains the city's scant involvement in the initial campaigns against the trade.¹ While there was certainly a good deal of support for slavery in a city with such an attachment to the trade and some instances of violence against those who made their anti-slavery stance public, this view is not entirely accurate. Abolitionists managed to operate quite safely and, at least in the campaign for emancipation, successfully in the city. There were many contributions to the anti-slavery cause made from Liverpool, both on an *ad hoc* individual level and in highly organised and effective ways. This study shows that there was a complex set of relationships between protagonists on both sides of the slavery debate. Ties to the slave trade and to the anti-slavery cause manifested themselves in multi-layered ways, encompassed diverse social classes and political viewpoints and operated on a regional, national and international basis. The North West of England compares well with North American regions with similar attachments to the slave trade and which were undergoing a similar pattern of

¹ I. Sellers, 'William Roscoe, the Roscoe Circle and Radical Politics in Liverpool, 1787-1807', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 120 (1968), pp. 49-53.

industrialisation.² While this study shows that abolitionism in both Liverpool and Manchester operated in a way which reflected local stimuli and concerns, there is a good deal of commonality with other areas of the country and further afield, illustrated by the links between activists, the nature of their arguments and the forces that motivated them.

There has been a long running debate among historians about why Britain abolished the trade in slaves and later, the institution of colonial slavery, when she did. Following from the work of earlier 'decline theorists', chiefly Lowell Ragatz, Eric Williams argues quite seductively that these decisions were made for economic reasons; that is, as the slave colonies began to lose money and as plantations could no longer attract investment, Britain abolished the trade in slaves, and then the institution of slavery itself and that British abolitionists' humanitarianism was a mask for their commercial and ideological concerns.³ More recently, the decline thesis of slavery has received support from Selwyn Carrington and Walter Minchinton.⁴ This study argues that there is a clear link between these ideological and commercial concerns and the growth of anti-slavery, but this link is neither simple nor consistent.

Williams' arguments have been countered, most notably by Seymour Drescher, who argues that the declining value of the slave colonies came about because of abolition, not the other way around, and that in the period leading up to abolition, the value of the West Indies colonies, in terms of their imports and exports, actually increased. Drescher asserts that the decline thesis is dependent upon a misreading of the evidence and on its adherents ignoring the figures that do not

² R. Chernos Lin, 'The Rhode Island Slave Traders: Butchers, Bakers and Candlestick-Makers', *Slavery and Abolition*, 23 (2002), pp. 21-38.

³ L.J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833* (New York, 1928); E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (first published, 1944); W. Darity Jr, 'The Williams Decline Thesis Before Williams', *Slavery and Abolition*, 9 (1988), pp. 29-41.

⁴ S.H.H. Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810* (Gainesville, 2002); W. Minchinton, 'Williams and Drescher', *Slavery and Abolition*, 4 (1983), pp. 81-105.

support their claim. Further, when commenting on the British Government's proposals for a gradual amelioration of the slaves' conditions, Drescher asserts that there was 'a clear-cut shift in institutionalised values of British society'.⁵ Further opposition to the decline thesis is to be found in the works of Roger Anstey, who argues that the slave system had little to do with the rise of industrial capitalism and that commercial arguments were made as a campaign tactic to achieve a wholly humanitarian goal. Anstey argues that it was the rising power of Nonconformists along with the reform of Parliament, not the rise of industrial capitalism, that created the conditions for the abolitionists to achieve their ends.⁶ According to David Brion Davis, Anstey turned Williams' ideas on their heads, putting forward the notion that 'appeals to the national interest cloaked hidden humanitarian motives'.⁷ It is unlikely, given its narrow geographical focus, that an examination of the activities of individuals and small groups will produce definitive evidence either to prove or rebut existing theories, but this study provides an opportunity for these ideas about the nation's shifting stance regarding slavery to be considered and evaluated.

Whilst it is not the intention of this thesis to provide a concrete answer to this debate, it is necessary to recognise its existence, and this study is contextualised to a degree by it. We can perhaps ascribe motivation for pro and anti-slavery sentiments to divisions in perceived self-interest and the ideologies that reflect these interests. However, whether individuals' interests were best served by 'protected' or 'free' trade, employers and employees alike in the textile industry and trade depended upon

⁵ S. Drescher, *Liverpool, The Africa Trade and Abolition* (Liverpool, 1976), p. 189; S. Drescher, *Econocide; British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburg, 1977); S. Drescher, 'The Decline Thesis of British Slavery Since *Econocide*', *Slavery and Abolition*, 1 (1980), pp. 3-23.

⁶ R. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London, 1975); R. Anstey, 'Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics, 1829-1833', *Slavery and Abolition*, 2 (1981), pp. 211-226.

⁷ D.B. Davis, Introduction to Anstey, 'Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics', p. 210.

both the slave trade and the institution of slavery for a significant proportion of their income. In the light of this, we need to consider a broader range of motivating forces for individuals' support or opposition to slave abolition. It is interesting to note at this point that though he had extensive transatlantic anti-slavery contacts, James Cropper's opposition to slavery on the American cotton plantations was not initially pursued or argued as zealously in public as his opposition to that in the West Indies, and that his free trade, free labour vision of world prosperity was heavily reliant upon the cotton industry, with its attendant links to slavery and the Manchester manufacturers.⁸ In Manchester, though the connections between textiles and slavery were obvious and important, direct links between cotton merchants and the slave system were not as numerous or explicit as those that existed between merchants and slavers in Liverpool.

The importance of Nonconformists generally, and Quakers in particular, to the anti-slavery cause ought not to be underestimated. The Quaker, Anthony Benezet, challenged eighteenth-century racial perceptions, influencing and inspiring abolitionist activity in Britain, especially, though not exclusively amongst his own religious brethren. Through a close examination of the Liverpoolian Quaker, James Cropper, this thesis underlines the importance of the Society of Friends, with their literate network, to the anti-slavery movements in their regional, national and international contexts.⁹ Preceding and influencing Benezet's first publication on the subject in 1759, *Observations on the Inslaving, Importing, and Purchasing of Negroes*, fellow Quaker John Woolman, aided by Benezet, published *Some*

⁸ This is discussed in chapter 4, 'The Impolicy of slavery: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

⁹ D.L. Crosby, 'Anthony Benezet's Transformation of Anti-Slavery Rhetoric' *Slavery and Abolition* 23 (2002), pp. 39-58; H. Temperly, 'The Ideology of Anti-Slavery', in D. Eltis and J. Walvin (eds), *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade; Origins and Effects in Europe, Africa and the Americas* (London, 1981), pp. 32-3.

Considerations on the Keeping of the Negroes in 1754. This tract chastises slave owners, especially those who were Quakers for not adhering to the Christian principle of doing to others as they would be done by. He challenges notions of racial inferiority and offers an explanation of how they come about:

Placing on men the ignominious title SLAVE ... tends gradually to fix a notion in the mind that they are a sort of people below us in nature, and leads us to consider them as such in all our conclusions about them.¹⁰

Woolman's arguments predate organised anti-slavery by more than twenty years, but we can see in them several signposts to the arguments that abolitionists in both campaigns would use: Christian duty, cruelty, greed and the basic equality of African and European people. These are all areas that James Cropper explored in the 1820s and 30s, though with considerably more aggression and an added appeal to the greed of his readership, with his claims that once freed, the Caribbean plantation workers would produce more profits.

This was an age when orthodox wisdom (amongst Europeans) had it that non-European people had a 'secondary racial ... [and] cultural status'. European perceptions of African people were based upon an entirely Eurocentric position and the relationship between them grounded in what Howard Temperly terms cultural imperialism. However, racist arguments were not confined to the supporters of slavery; indeed they permeated the thinking of many white abolitionists. Reflecting contemporary orthodoxy, protagonists on both sides of the slavery debate in Britain argued that their role was to civilise the slaves and bring their morals and intellectual levels closer to European standards. For some this would be brought about by conversion to Christianity, with or without an education programme, but others believed that emancipating the slaves would enable them to raise themselves to these

¹⁰ John Woolman, *Some Considerations on the Keeping of the Negroes* (1754), in A. Bradstock and C. Rowland (eds), *Radical Christian Writings, A Reader* (Oxford, 2002), p. 174.

levels.¹¹ Whilst some planters may well have recognised the Africans' humanity, but refused to let the ethics of their enterprise interfere with their profits, some of their opponents in the anti-slavery lobby were on occasion guilty of denying the slaves' full human identity. One example was the moderate, Unitarian abolitionist, William Ellery Channing, who wrote in 1835, 'The African is so affectionate, imitative, and docile that in favourable circumstances he catches much that is good; and accordingly the influence of a wise and kind master will be seen in the very countenance of his slaves.'¹²

The Rev. Richard Bickell, writing in 1824, expresses similar sentiments. Seemingly arguing from a stance of preventing cruelty to *lesser* beings, he bemoans the slaves' status as chattels or animals, yet still refers to them (at best patronisingly) as creatures, and makes references to slaves, who 'loved' their master, 'They seldom run away unless they have been ill-used in some way or other.'¹³ This suggests that Bickell was not opposed to slavery *per se*, but to the mistreatment of slaves: an idea perhaps more likely to find support amongst the British public than would outright condemnation. No real challenge to contemporary values and assumptions is evident within his arguments, which seem to be based upon patriarchal notions of racial supremacy.

William Wilberforce, despite his moderate stance and adherence to orthodox values, did not argue that white people were superior to black people, but he did

¹¹ E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London, 1993), p.70; H. Temperly, 'Anti-Slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism', in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds) *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), pp. 335-50; P.J. Marshall and G. Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London, 1982), pp. 227-254; V. Kiernon, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age* (1969; London, 1995), pp. 210-13; J. Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society* (London, 1973), pp. 159-74, 179.

¹² William Ellery Channing, *Slavery* (1835), quoted in Walvin, *Black and White*, p. 114

¹³ Richard Bickell, *The West Indies as they are: or a Real Picture of Slavery But more Particularly as it Exists in the Island of Jamaica* (1824), published in the *Christian Observer*, March 1825. National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, NMGM D/CR/12/20.

recognise the currency of such a view. Writing in 1823, he acknowledges that many of his contemporaries believed Europeans to be superior to Africans. Whilst not attacking the holders of such views, he does state his own position:

... though the old prejudices that the negroes are creatures of an inferior nature, is no longer maintained in terms, there is yet too much reason to fear that a latent impression arising from it still continue practically to operate in the colonies, and to influence the minds of those who have the government of slaves, in estimating their physical claims, and still more those of their moral nature.¹⁴

A lack of willingness to challenge contemporary assumptions regarding race can be detected in the Newcastle Anti-Slavery Society's response to the British Government's 1823 proposals to ameliorate the slaves' conditions. At a meeting of the society in March 1824, the first resolution was:

Through ... judicious and temperate enforcement of such measures, this house looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the slave population; such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty's subjects.¹⁵

Also recommending the adoption of these proposals, and displaying unity with standard British imperialist values and assumptions, the *Globe and Traveller*, referring to Haiti (formerly the French colony of St. Domingue), showed alarm at the prospect of more revolutionary, independent, black republics coming into being. Should the proposals not be adopted, planters were warned, they would suffer the same fate as their French counterparts in St. Domingue, whose only recompense for their losses 'has sprung from the seeds of civilisation which they have left behind in the minds of the black population'.¹⁶ It will be interesting, during the course of this study, to examine how such assumptions are manifested and employed by both sides

¹⁴ William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to The Religion, Justice And Honour of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, In Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London, 1823), pp. 43-4.

¹⁵ Resolution i, meeting of the Newcastle Anti-Slavery Society, 31 March 1824, reported in the *Newcastle Chronicle*, 3 March 1824, NMGM, D/CR/13.

¹⁶ *Globe and Traveller*, 8 Nov, 1825, NMGM, D/CR/13.

in the slavery debate, locally, and to try and detect whether and how these attitudes changed amongst the protagonists in the debate about slavery.

Whilst many abolitionists certainly held views on racial issues which were no more enlightened than their pro-slavery counterparts, there were contributors to the anti-slavery cause, who argued that Africans and Europeans ought to be seen as equals. The celebrated poet, William Cowper published poems that attacked the trade in slaves and the institution of slavery itself. He viewed Africans as intellectually equal to Europeans and, in his 1793 poem 'The Negroes Complaint', he warns those with an interest in the plantation system of the likelihood and consequences of the slaves rebelling. This would be sure to strike a chord with Cowper's readership, who would be keeping abreast of events in Haiti, where the slaves were doing just that. Dismissing the colour of Africans' skin as a reason for their enslavement and referring to the slave traders and plantation owners as 'slaves of gold', Cowper finishes his attack by questioning the orthodox assumption of white superiority,

'Deem our nation brutes no longer
... Prove that you have human feelings
Ere you proudly question ours!'¹⁷

This diversity in perceptions of race amongst abolitionists is reflected amongst contributors to the debate in the North West of England. For instance, the blind, radical Liverpudlian poet, Edward Rushton, wrote in a similar vein to Cowper, attacking those who had grown rich on the back of slavery or the slave trade, defending Africans' humanity and supporting notions of liberty for all.¹⁸ This study shows how the holders of these various views found common ground and united

¹⁷ William Cowper. 'The Negro's Complaint' published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (Dec 1793) reprinted in A. Richardson (ed.), *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*, 4 vols (London, 1999), iv, pp. 75-7.

¹⁸ This is discussed in chapter 2. 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

under campaigns that satisfied at least some of the objectives of the majority of abolitionists.

Poetry was a popular medium of propaganda in the abolitionist campaigns and the works of Rushton and other poets with connections to the region, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Birkett and Eliza Knipe, are considered in this thesis. Against this, there are also examples of poetry being used as a propaganda tool by the pro-slavery lobby. One such example is James Boswell's 1791 *No Abolition of Slavery*.¹⁹ Published anonymously, Boswell's authorship of this poem was nevertheless widely known. In addition to illustrating their authors' concerns, an examination of these poems ought to help ascertain how they perceived their readership's positions on broader issues, such as race, religion and economics.

The changing economic climate played an important part in forming attitudes towards slavery. The new industrial capitalists' mantra of free trade was tied in the minds of many to broader ideas of freedom. As Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* became increasingly influential, notions of prosperity for all, but most especially for the middle class, gained currency. Smith stated that slave labour was in the final analysis more expensive than wage labour.²⁰ Whilst the living and working conditions of the working classes in England caused consternation for many who drew unfavourable comparisons with those of the plantation slaves, Smith's ideas were adopted by a significant number of reformers, though not all opponents to slavery were advocates of free trade. Mancunian Thomas Walker and Bishop Beilby Porteus provide us with two examples anti-free trade abolitionists in the region.

The clergy, and notions of Christian duty (often tied to perceptions of racial and cultural superiority), played an important role in the abolition debate, being cited

¹⁹ J. Boswell, *No Abolition of Slavery; or the Universal Empire of Love* (London, 1791) reprinted in Richardson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, iv, pp. 171-91.

²⁰ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Books I-III* (1776, reprint, London 1986), p. 183.

to support disparate interpretations of the issue. Throughout both anti-slavery campaigns and indeed later reform campaigns, the ‘correct’ Christian position was constantly debated. Seymour Drescher argues that religious networks had an ‘especially significant’ part to play in British abolitionism’s development.²¹ An anonymous single sheet pamphlet, published in Liverpool during the 1820s provides an illustration of this. *Slavery in the West Indies* lists some of the ‘barbarities and abominations’ as they existed in the West Indies and argues what its author considers to be the correct Christian position:

Every enlightened Christian will allow, that to keep our fellow creatures in so degraded and painful a condition is inconsistent with those principles of charity and true liberty, which distinguish the Gospel;- and it will probably be admitted by most persons, that man cannot, under any possible circumstances, be possessed of a *right* to trade in his fellow creatures, and to retain them in bondage *as his property*.²²

Appeals to their readership’s desire to adhere to the correct Christian position are a feature of much of the propaganda published on both sides of the slavery debate in the region. For instance, in 1788, Raimundo Hormoza (writing as Rev. Raymond Harris) published *Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade* in Liverpool, arguing that the slave trade had ‘the positive sanction of the Divine Authority’.²³

In addition to examining the appeals to Christian sensibilities made by propagandists, this study will consider the role of various members of the clergy in the North West of England alongside the largely political wranglings between the established Church of England and Nonconformist sects, which provided a backdrop

²¹ S. Drescher, ‘Two Variants of Anti-Slavery: Religious Organization and Social Mobilization in Britain and France, 1780-1870’, in Bolt and Drescher, *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform*, p.45.

²² Anonymous, *Slavery in the West Indies* (Liverpool n.d. 1820s).

²³ R. Harris, *Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade, Shewing its Conformity with Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion Delineated in the Sacred Writings of God* (Liverpool, 1788) in P. Kitson (ed.), *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*, 4 vols (London, 1999), ii, pp. 283-323.

for a good deal of the debate about slavery and other reform issues during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Criticising the Church of England's role in the slave system, Beverly Bryan *et al* argue that the Anglican Church was 'among the leading exponents of the merits of slavery' and that its attitude along with that of its adherents were a reflection of those in society at large. Given that a significant number of prominent Anglicans as well as Nonconformists were active in the campaigns against both the trade in slaves and the institution of slavery, their assertion that 'Christianity has rarely been able to rise above the economic imperatives of the day' seems to be seriously flawed.²⁴ However, as the economic organisation changed from mercantile to industrial capitalism, it brought with it a change in political and economic thinking, and the emergence of *laissez faire* ideology. In the light of this, there is a case to be argued that Christians with abolitionist sympathies were merely reflecting the changing perceived economic imperatives of the day. Though this study illustrates examples of Christian abolitionists and political activists in the North West of England, whose motives and activities bear this out, it would be far too simplistic to apply this motivation to all Christian abolitionists in the region, or nationwide. However, it can be seen that the diverse Christian sects in their varied contribution to the slavery debate did reflect similar forces in society at large.

The issue of slavery provided a context for antagonism between Christians of different sects. There were concerted efforts on the part of the differing Christian denominations to convert the slaves to Christianity. The Nonconformists enjoyed greater success in this endeavour than did the Established Church. With its attendant images of liberty and revenge, the appeal of Dissenting Protestantism to the slaves

²⁴ B. Bryan, S. Dadzie and S. Scafe, *The Heart of the Race, Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London, 1985), p. 8.

was a cause of much concern to the Church of England. Members of the Anglican Church accused Nonconformists, especially Baptists, of fomenting unrest and rebellion in the colonies and pro-slavery advocates cited recent uprisings to illustrate Africans' inability to behave in a civilised manner.

Abolitionists responded to these fears by arguing that free Africans could be relied upon not to behave in inappropriate ways. An anonymous pamphlet from the 1820s refers to Haiti, Brazil and Sierra Leone to show how, relatively speaking, independent Africans could manage quite well on their own.²⁵ The author bemoans the status of free black people in Jamaica and argues for slave emancipation. He also refers to the lack of success enjoyed by missionaries in converting the slaves to Christianity and is pessimistic about the chances of rapid conversion, given the lack of will on the part of the planters to encourage or even allow Christian instruction and their open hostility to it. The pamphlet concludes with a refutation of the pro-slavery argument that until the slaves were converted to Christianity, they would be unfit for freedom:

I do not know where between fifty and a hundred years would be the probable period for the completion of the task of converting the slaves to Christianity; even if it should be fixed at fifty which must be far too low, I hope none would lightly resolve on leaving the negroes in slavery till the work should be accomplished.²⁶

There are examples of orthodox clergymen making aggressive arguments against slavery. One such is Samuel Horsley, Bishop of Rochester and then St. Davids, who had spoken in favour of emancipation in 1796.²⁷ Echoing the arguments for free-grown over slave-grown goods, he rhetorically questioned Christians in his

²⁵ Anonymous. *Facts Proving the Good Conduct and Prosperity of Emancipated Negroes, and Remarks on Melioration* (no place of publication, n.d. 1820s).

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 34-5.

²⁷ J. Jennings. *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave trade 1783-1807* (London 1994), p. 74.

pamphlet, *Questions to Professing Christians on the Use of Slave-Grown Sugar, Coffee, &c.* in which Horsley threatens damnation on all who have any connection at all with the slave trade or slave-produced goods.²⁸ Contemporary assumptions about race seem to be strongly challenged in this pamphlet, by the promotion of Christian values; most middle class Britons would be horrified, if they believed themselves not to be acting in accordance with Christian teaching. However, not all the clergy were as forthright as Bishop Horsley. It is clear that motivations for abolitionist activity amongst clergy and lay Christians of all denominations were driven by a diverse, overlapping range of factors. This clearly reflects the diversity of opinions to be found amongst abolitionists at large.

This overlapping of interest is illustrated by the career of Horsley's contemporary, Bishop Beilby Porteus, who publicly campaigned for abolition of the slave trade and for amelioration of conditions on the plantations, but had a rather condescending view of the lower orders (including the slaves), considering them to be disorderly and in need of disciplining and *remoralising*. He was very much opposed to the ideas of progressive reformers.²⁹ Rev David Simpson of Macclesfield would appear to have been something of an ally of Porteus; they were both public opponents of slavery and fearful of radical politics. However, the two crossed swords over Simpson's close ties to Methodism, and their relationship is characterised by Porteus' disapproval of Simpson. These two early Cheshire-based abolitionists did not so much

²⁸ S. Horsley, *Questions to Professing Christians on the Use of Slave-grown Sugar, Coffee, &c.* (Birmingham, n.d. c.1827-8), NMGM, D/CR/12/34. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 7, 'The Political Life of Dr Beilby Porteus'.

²⁹ R. Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus, D.D. Late Bishop of London*. (London, 1811), p. 100; R. Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus, D.D. Late Bishop of London, With His Life*, 6 vols (new edition, London, 1823), ii, 'Sermons', pp 201-20, 391-428, and iv, 'Lectures', pp. 291-2 ; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p. 499. This argument is considered further in chapter 7 'The Political Life of Dr Beilby Porteus'.

work together in the anti-slavery campaigns, but rather both made discrete, separate contributions.

The government proposals for gradual and selective amelioration of the slaves' conditions met with various responses amongst abolitionists. Reflecting the city's changing perception of the abolitionist cause, the *Liverpool Mercury* reported that opponents to the measures 'regretted that so partial a measure of amelioration should be adopted' and argued that it was absurd to expect colonial legislatures to adopt these measures voluntarily, claiming that 'the partial measures now proposed would have a pernicious effect both on masters and slaves'.³⁰

In response to these proposals, the Rev. Richard Kennedy claimed that the British Government shared the abolitionists' aims:

They have precisely the same object at heart, though there may be a difference of opinion as to the time required and the means to be used ... we are aware, and readily acknowledge, that there are many weighty considerations and many obstacles, better known to them than us, which prevent them from making such approaches towards its accomplishment, as they and we equally desire.³¹

It appears that Kennedy, in common with other moderates, including members the Newcastle Anti-Slavery Society who argued that planters should receive a 'fair equitable compensation', did not see these proposals as a feeble compromise, but an illustration of a change in establishment values.³²

Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of an absolute clarity about the proper stance Christian abolitionists should take (Bishop Horsley's *Questions* notwithstanding), appeals to Christian values were a constant theme in abolitionist arguments. Supporters of slavery made these same appeals. J.G. Kemneys argued that 'the colonists of the West-Indies are instrumental in humanising the descendents of

³⁰ *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 March 1824, NMGM, D/CR/13.

³¹ R. Kennedy, *Slave Trade* (March/April 1824), NMGM, D/CR/13.

³² Resolution *iv* meeting of the Newcastle Anti-Slavery Society, 31 March 1824, reported in the *Newcastle Chronicle*, 3 March 1824, NMGM, D/CR/13.

the offspring of even brutes ... to the honour of the human species, and to the glory of the divine being'.³³ William Sells, writing four decades later, provides us with another. Referring to the slaves' lack of legal rights (concerning the giving of evidence against white people), Sells promotes and appeals to orthodox views of both religion and race. Refusing to accept Africans as equal to Europeans, he argues:

These causes will gradually cease to operate, when the civilisation of the slaves has continued a while longer in its progressive state, and a competent religious instruction has impressed upon their minds the sacred obligation of an oath.³⁴

By condemning abolitionists for dogmatism and for introducing the emancipation question 'prematurely', Sells' *Remarks* provides support for the British Government and the slave owners. His work is illustrative of the mind-set that the abolitionists had to overcome, the accepted orthodoxy of which perhaps explains why many abolitionist demands and proposals were so modest.

Moderate abolitionists continued to contribute throughout the campaigns in an attempt to appeal to a middle ground of opinion. At the same time, a good many activists in both the campaign against the slave trade and the later campaign for emancipation argued that no such middle ground could exist. In 1824, the same year that Rev. Kennedy published his moderate and almost sycophantic *Slave Trade*, abolitionists in Manchester published (anonymously) Elizabeth Heyrick's *Immediate not Gradual Abolition*, in which, she argued that the whole nation must now divide itself into the 'active supporters, and the active opposers of slavery; there is no longer any ground for the neutral party to stand upon'.³⁵

³³ J. G. Kemeys, *Free and Candid Reflections* (1783), quoted in P. Fryer, *Staying Power, Black People in the British Empire* (London, 1993), p. 64.

³⁴ William Sells, *Remarks on the Condition of the Slaves in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1823), pp. 4-5.

³⁵ Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate not Gradual Abolition; or an Inquiry Into the Shortest, Safest, and Most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery* (Manchester, 1824), p.5. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 5, 'Manchester Abolitionists'.

The Liverpool pamphlet, *Slavery in the West Indies* argues for immediate action, but gradual emancipation:

It is better for all the parties concerned that this work should be effected *gradually*. Prudence must dwell with wisdom in its execution. But it ought to be begun: it ought to be carried forward. It may be begun; it may be carried forward ... to the joy and happiness, and restoration of the negro, and without the slightest injury to his master, or to the public.³⁶

Here the author recognizes the public's fear of free Africans in the Caribbean, following the Haitian Revolution and the potential (as perceived by the public) for economic losses, though he or she refutes these notions. The author continues, fighting shy of openly criticizing the planters, excusing them, as Wilberforce did, on the grounds that they were unaware of conditions on the plantations, since many of them were by this time effectively absentee landlords, leaving control of their estates in the hands of agents.³⁷ Despite this moderate stance, the author employs strong language and asks whether any thing could be 'more cruel and nefarious; any thing more fraught with physical suffering or moral degradation; any thing more offensive to God, or more injurious to man; than *West India slavery*?' The text concludes with a vividly worded appeal to patriotism and humanitarianism, urging that 'England may be delivered from the guilt of participating in a system, distinguished by all the features of the grossest injustice, and traced, from its origin to its end, in BLOOD'.³⁸

This follows a similar line to that followed by Wilberforce who illustrates his own moderate and non confrontational stance in a pamphlet of 1823. In it, he states:

... while we expose and condemn the evils of the system itself, we should treat with candour and tenderness the characters of the West Indian proprietors. ... I have before declared and now willingly repeat, that I sincerely believe many of the owners of West Indian estates to be men of more than common kindness

³⁶ Anonymous, *Slavery in the West Indies*.

³⁷ G. Heuman, 'The British West Indies', in A. Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. III, the Nineteenth Century (Oxford, 1999), p. 472; J. Walvin, *Black Ivory* (London, 1992), pp. 74-5; B.W. Higman, 'The West India Interest in Parliament', *Historical Studies* (Australia), 13 (1967), p. 2.

³⁸ Anonymous, *Slavery in the West Indies*.

and liberality; but I myself have found many of them, as I have had every reason to believe, utterly unacquainted with the true nature and practical character of the system with which they have the misfortune to be connected.³⁹

Almost on the eve of emancipation, the interested observer of the slavery debate was still subject to a plurality of views expressed in abolitionist propaganda. In 1832, John Jeremies published the second edition of his *Four Essays in Colonial Slavery*. Jeremies who styles himself, ‘Late First President of the Royal Court of St. Lucia and now Procureur General of the Mauritus’, claimed his independence from protagonists in the slavery debate, but was clearly opposed to the institution.⁴⁰ He argued for immediate measures to be taken, but measures which would have a gradual effect in abolishing the institution of slavery. He also reveals his limited support for and loyalty to the plantocracy, who were after all his former neighbours, arguing that paying compensation to planters would be only correct and proper, but not as an inducement for the release of the slaves, as the planters wished, but as a reward for having done so.⁴¹

This collection of essays features some of the arguments and themes utilised and addressed by abolitionists in the region and discussed within this study. Having discussed some features of life in the plantation communities in the first essay, ‘General Features of Slave Communities’, Jeremies confronts orthodox contemporary views on race, held by many abolitionists as well as pro-slavery advocates. Echoing the sentiments of Liverpudlian abolitionist, Edward Rushton, some four decades

³⁹ William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to The Religion, Justice And Honour of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, In Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ John Jeremies, *Four Essays in Colonial Slavery* (second edition, London, 1831).

⁴¹ John Jeremies, ‘Results of Measures hitherto adopted, and view of the farther steps to be taken to promote the final annihilation of Slavery’, in *Ibid.* pp. 118-123.

earlier, he concedes that black and white people are better suited to working in different climates, but utterly refutes any notion of European superiority.⁴²

In an appeal to commercial sensibilities and chiming in with arguments forwarded by another Liverpoolian abolitionist, his contemporary James Cropper, the third essay in this collection talks positively about the effects of amelioration on productivity and behaviour, revealing his pride in having presided over these improvements in St. Lucia. He argues that free labour is more productive than slave labour. One might be forgiven for wondering why, in the light of their improved productivity, that Jeremies is demanding only gradual emancipation for the slaves. Perhaps he is less convinced than Cropper about the correctness of this particular economic argument, or more concerned with placing himself at odds with his former neighbours.⁴³

The issue of 'free-grown' East Indies goods, and their relative expense when compared to slave-grown goods was widely recognised by abolitionists, and was a common theme in their propaganda. James Cropper discusses this theme in *Impolicy of Slavery*, published in 1822, causing a controversy in the Liverpool press through the following two years. In this call for free trade, Cropper argues for a lifting of duties on East Indies goods and calls for a halt on the bounties paid to the West Indian planters.⁴⁴ Mancunian abolitionists also argued for free trade in this way; an anonymous pamphlet published in the city in 1824 sets out the relative duties on East Indies and West Indies goods and makes appeals to commercial interests, claiming

⁴² John Jeremies, 'General theories involved in the consideration of the Question of Slavery: - Colour, Climate, Monopoly, Free Labour' in *Ibid.* pp. 42-65. Edward Rushton is discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

⁴³ John Jeremies, 'Ameliorations introduced into St. Lucia and practicable elsewhere', in *Four Essays in Colonial Slavery*, pp.66-93. James Cropper's position and activities are discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4, 'Liverpool abolitionists', 'James Cropper's Rise to Prominence' and 'The Impolicy of slavery: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'

⁴⁴ James Cropper, *Impolicy of Slavery* (Liverpool, 1822). This is discussed in chapter 4, 'The Impolicy of Slavery'.

that the slave colonies were too expensive to maintain and that British economic interests were being damaged by the commercial protection offered to the West Indian planters.⁴⁵ It must be recognised that conditions for indigenous workers in Britain's eastern colonies were little better than those in the Caribbean. Although abolitionists tended not to muddy the waters of their free trade free labour arguments with this detail, some of them were certainly aware of it and did publicly campaign against these conditions, particularly the use of African slaves in Mauritius.⁴⁶

As part of this campaign, a pamphlet of 1826 urged its readers to 'tell the shopkeeper, *pure East-Indies sugar, or no sugar*, and they will provide themselves accordingly'.⁴⁷ The same issue is alluded to in another pamphlet of the same year, *What Does Your Sugar Cost? A Cottage Conversation*. The conversation of the title features a representative of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery and a well-to-do English housewife; he tells her:

A gentleman that I know very well, who came from the West-Indies, told me he was once helping to pack some puncheons of rum. A Negro who helped him happened to hurt his hand, and it bled, and he washed his hand in one of the puncheons of rum. The gentleman reproved him for it, and said, 'Your blood will be drunk in England.' The Negro answered, 'You no think, massa, when you eat our sugar, you drink our blood'.⁴⁸

This extract, though anecdotal and apocryphal, is particularly illustrative in two areas. Firstly, it attempts to convey a powerful message regarding the human cost of slave-grown sugar, implicitly asking its readership to weigh this against the extra monetary cost of East-Indian sugar. A clear challenge to contemporary values and assumptions can be seen here; the public are being asked to place human welfare (and

⁴⁵ Anonymous, *Trade to the East Indies* (Manchester, 1824). This pamphlet is discussed in chapter 5, 'Manchester Abolitionists'.

⁴⁶ *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (Manchester) January 1829.

⁴⁷ Anonymous, *No British Slavery; An Invitation to People to Put a Speedy End to it* (London, 1826) pp. 4-5, NMGM, D/CR/12/14.

⁴⁸ *What Does Your Sugar Cost? A Cottage Conversation* (Birmingham 1828), p. 6, NMGM, D/CR/12/15.

black humans, at that) above economic concerns. *What Does Your Sugar Cost?* also illustrates the important and complex role played by women in the debate. Published by the Female Society for Birmingham, in support of the boycott on slave-grown sugar which was largely co-ordinated by women, *What Does Your Sugar Cost?* is one amongst many publications disseminated by, targeted at and featuring women. It both appeals to and challenges patriarchal ideas of women's subordinate role in society, at a time when their increasing involvement in the anti-slavery cause was, for the most part, merely tolerated with varying degrees of reluctance by male abolitionists.⁴⁹

With a shared hinterland and strong commercial ties, Liverpool and Manchester can perhaps be seen as a single economic entity, during the period in question. However, it is apparent that the people of Manchester embraced the anti-slavery cause to a much greater extent than did Liverpool's citizens in the campaign against the slave trade up to 1807. Many petitions from Manchester were sent to Parliament, whilst in Liverpool, there was an active and vibrant pro-slavery lobby and a culture of celebration of the 'Africa Trade' was prevalent in the city. In the light of this, it will be interesting to note the activities of anti-slavery protestors in the two cities, how they worked with each other and campaigners elsewhere (at home and abroad), and how the debate about slavery and the slave trade was conducted.

The rise of James Cropper to prominence in the anti-slavery movement provides a focus for much of this thesis, as it illustrates the shift in abolitionist leadership in the region from Manchester to Liverpool. Through examining his rise to prominence within the anti-slavery movement, this thesis provides us with a more accurate and complete appraisal of James Cropper's contribution than is typically ascribed to him by historians. This enables us to form a clearer and more credible

⁴⁹ C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery, The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London, 1992), p. 70.

picture of the Liverpudlian abolitionists' centrality to the emancipation campaign than the rather shallow and unsatisfactory existing views of the city's involvement in the anti-slavery cause.

The Cropper archive holds many clues to both Cropper's activities and his motives for opposition to the slave trade. Further, his correspondence with other abolitionists reveals some of their prejudices and motives. For example, Wilberforce wrote to Cropper as late as 1822, warning against recruiting the 'wrong sort' of members to the Liverpool Society:

I think you are quite right in being cautious whom you admit into your society; for ... it sometimes happens that a prejudice is conceived against it altogether from its containing the names of one or two persons who are obnoxious to public prejudice & who may be supposed likely to give a tincture to the proceedings.⁵⁰

This is evidence of the lack of homogeneity amongst abolitionists; that other than an opposition to the institution of slavery (or before 1807, the trade in slaves), there was no binding ideology. Cropper was certainly aware of the plurality of values and assumptions amongst his fellow abolitionists. His two scrapbooks of anti-slavery paraphernalia contain cuttings and pamphlets that illustrate this broad range of views. The complex, occasionally self contradictory, arguments he made in public also illustrate the broad range of interests to which he felt he needed to appeal in order to achieve his objectives.

As a prosperous businessman, with extensive interests in East Indian (free) trade, James Cropper was open to the accusation of protectionism. An argument can easily be framed that Cropper's aversion to slave-grown goods came on the back of his need to protect his East Indies interests, but it seems that he was not that cynical. He reversed the argument, arguing that, 'the cultivation of sugar in our dominions

⁵⁰ William Wilberforce, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 23 Oct 1822, NMGM, D/CR/4/3.

[would be] the natural and certain means of effecting the total and general abolition of the slave trade.’⁵¹ Cropper and his family were central to the boycott of slave-grown produce and made up parcels of East-Indies sugar and coffee, distributing them amongst Members of Parliament and potential sympathisers.

Whatever the driving force behind his abolitionist stance, Cropper’s views on broader issues appear to show him at odds with many of his contemporaries. If we examine Cropper’s attitude to poverty in Ireland, alongside his opposition to slavery, we see a complicated relationship with orthodox thinking. Cropper visited Ireland in 1824 with his daughter, Eliza, where he witnessed acute poverty, which he attributed to the British government’s trade restrictions.⁵² Cropper recognised poverty (in England, as well as Ireland) as a problem that needed tackling, not for reasons of social control, but from a sense of Christian fellowship, philanthropy, or compassion. Importantly, he saw the oppression of Irish peasants and New World slaves as part of the same problem, and their respective relief, he believed, were similarly tied together.

With low wage expectations and seemingly inexhaustible reserves of peat for fuel, Cropper believed Ireland to have great potential for manufacturing. The trade in East-Indies sugar was unfairly hampered by slave-grown sugar’s relative cheapness, and therefore, Cropper argued, the wage earners of Hindustan were unable to buy the cotton produce that the starving Irish would gladly make, if they were not prevented from doing so by unreasonable tariffs. Slave emancipation, coupled with fair trading

⁵¹ James Cropper, personal correspondence to William Wilberforce, published in *Letters to William Wilberforce, M.P.* (Liverpool 1822), p. vii, cited in Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* pp. 186-7, 255-6.

⁵² *The Waterford Chronicle*, 23 Nov and 27 Nov. 1824; *The Waterford Mirror*, 29 Nov. 1824, NMGM, D/CR/13.

conditions for Ireland, Cropper believed, were not merely humanitarian issues, but sound economic policy.⁵³

Whilst Cropper's concern for the Irish, as well as slaves in the West-Indian colonies, would seem to indicate some sort of challenge to contemporary values and assumptions, his belief that commerce operated best under *natural* market forces, and that this was proved by the British economy with its 'unrestrained and free' workforce, illustrate that orthodox economic views were changing during the period.⁵⁴ Cropper's awareness of the problems of poverty nearer to home in Lancashire is evinced by his philanthropic activities. He had set up a ragged school for boys and a home for 'fallen girls' in Liverpool, and upon inheriting his father's farm at Fearnhead, near Ormskirk, offered food and employment to anyone prepared to work for him. Despite these endeavours, it appears that Cropper failed to see that what he was combating was the direct effect of the growing 'free' market, with its 'unrestrained and free' workers, and 'unshackled' commerce.⁵⁵

The conditions suffered by the working class of Lancashire were likened to, or even considered worse than, those suffered by colonial slaves by some radical commentators of the day. William Cobbett in an open letter to Wilberforce, from 1823 responded to the latter's publication of the same year, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies*. Cobbett berates the abolitionists, in general, and Wilberforce in particular for their 'cant' and 'hypocrisy.' He accuses Wilberforce of

⁵³ F. A. Coneybeare, *Dingle Bank* (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 16-17.

⁵⁴ James Cropper speaking at Derby 22 Nov. 1825, D/CR/13; James Cropper, correspondence to the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, 1823, cited in Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; reprint, London, 1964), pp. 187, 256.

⁵⁵ James Cropper, correspondence to the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, 1823; cited in Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, pp. 187, 256.

ignorance on the real 'situation of the blacks' and refers to the Lancashire working class as 'white slaves.' He continues by addressing Wilberforce:

You talk a great deal about the partiality of the laws in the West Indies. What you say about the inhumanity of these laws is right enough; but have you Wilberforce, have you ever done anything to mitigate the laws which exist in this country with regard to those free British labourers of which you so cantingly talk? Never have you done one single act, in favour of the labourers of this country; but many and many an act have you done against them.⁵⁶

In addition to his ignorance of the conditions experienced by West Indian slaves, Wilberforce is (perhaps quite fairly) accused of not having any interest in improving the lot of the English working class. Whilst James Cropper's views on poverty and oppression had a broader compass than many of his fellow anti-slavery campaigners, his politically adept championing of the free market is revealing. Citing accepted economic thinking to support his arguments would render them potentially more acceptable to his contemporaries. It is one of a number of examples of anti-slavery campaigners engaging with broadly orthodox values, in this instance the prosperity of the nation, to expose flaws and weaknesses in pro-slavery arguments, by appealing variously to the public's economic good sense, ideas of race and religious sentiments.

By considering the changing economic and political landscape in the region, this study aims to help create a clearer understanding of how slave abolitionists operated in a region at the hub of the trade in slaves and slave-produced goods, what drove them and how they related to each other. Chester's declining economic importance but continuing cultural influence, illustrated here in large part by the activities of Beilby Porteus, is an important consideration. Porteus' career shows us

⁵⁶ William Cobbett, 'To William Wilberforce on the state of the cotton factory labourers, and on the speech of Andrew Ryding who cut Horrocks with a Cleaver', *Political Register* Aug 1823, reprinted in N. Thompson and D. Eastwood (eds), *The Collected Social and Political Writings of William Cobbett* (London, 1998), pp. 351-67.

that the bishopric of Chester retained its religious influence throughout the region during the anti-slavery campaigns, providing a counter to the increasingly potent economic arguments that coloured the debate.

The main thrust of the thesis is to illustrate how a region with such a central role in the slave system played a similarly central part in the campaigns against the trade in slaves and the institution of slavery. The following chapters provide an examination of the backdrop against which anti-slavery activities may be considered and studies of important individuals active in the region. The individual case studies included here, most especially Beilby Porteus and James Cropper, illustrate how protagonists used the issue of slavery to underpin their opposing broader political, religious and economic positions, and how the issue divided those who shared common broader positions. These complex sets of relationships strongly suggest that both the 'decline' and 'economic suicide' theses are incapable of fully explaining Britain's abandoning the slave system.

Chapter 2.

Liverpool Abolitionists

‘The story of [the] increase in the slave trade is mainly the story of the rise of Liverpool’.¹ So argues Eric Williams, building a case for tying the rise of transatlantic slavery to that of mercantile capitalism, and its fall to the growth of industrial capitalism. Liverpool’s centrality and prominence in the slave trade is beyond question and the importance of the slave system to the city’s economic fortunes cannot be doubted, but Williams is overstating the case here. To describe Liverpool’s rise in this way is too simplistic and ignores the volume of trade in the city in areas not connected with, or reliant upon slavery. The city’s rise was due to many commercial factors, not all of which were necessarily directly connected with slave trade. Amongst these were the export and coastal distribution of coal mined in Lancashire and salt extracted in Cheshire.

Improvements in the local inland waterway infrastructure enabled the transportation of large volumes of these bulky materials from their inland places of extraction to open water at Liverpool. This in turn made the transportation of other raw materials and manufactured goods to and from Liverpool considerably more cost effective, reducing costs in some instances by as much as 75 per cent, thus opening the port up to act as a conduit for goods and materials for manufacturers in West Yorkshire, the Potteries in Staffordshire and the manufacturing districts of the West Midlands, in addition to those goods grown, processed and manufactured in

¹ E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; reprint, London, 1964), p. 34.

Liverpool's more immediate hinterland of South Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales.²

The importance of salt Liverpool's growth was recognised by travel guide writer, John Holt in 1790. He claimed:

The salt trade is generally acknowledged to have been the nursing mother and to have contributed more to the first rise, gradual increase and present flourishing state of the town of Liverpool than any other article of commerce.³

Liverpool had charters dating back to 1207 (from King John) and 1229 (from Henry III).⁴ This determined the political administration for almost the next four hundred years:

... by this our charter [we] have confirmed that our township of Leverepul [Liverpool] shall be forever a Free Borough, and that Burgesses ... shall have a Merchant Gild ... and that no one, who is not of that gild, shall transact any business ... except by the consent of the same Burgesses ... we also forbid anyone to injure, damage or molest the aforesaid Burgesses on pain of forfeiture to us [The King] of ten Pounds.⁵

In 1626, Charles I granted a new charter to the town, confirming existing rights and privileges and specifically incorporating the town of Liverpool. It provided for the appointment of a mayor, who along with a senior alderman would be also be appointed as J.P. for Liverpool. It also allowed for the appointment of two bailiffs and a town clerk and provided for a common seal. Royal connections were severed as Charles I sold the town to merchants and it eventually came into the hands of Lord Molyneux. Liverpool, to the expense of this gentleman, was solidly behind Parliament during the English Civil War; it was largely Lord Molyneux's trees that were felled to provide timber for rebuilding parts of Liverpool after Royalist forces had caused

² F. Vigier, *Change and Apathy, Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1970), pp. 37, 62-3; H.F. Starkey, *Schooner Port, Two Centuries of Upper Mersey Sail* (1983; reprint, Bebbington, 1998), pp. 5-6; C.B. Phillips and J.H. Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540* (London, 1994), pp. 99-101.

³ Quoted in H.F. Starkey, *Schooner Port*, p. 5.

⁴ G. Chandler, *Liverpool* (London, 1957), pp. 17, 24-6, 473-4.

⁵ Henry III's Charter to Liverpool, in *Ibid.* p. 25.

extensive damage.⁶ After the restoration of the monarchy, unsuccessful applications were made for a new charter in 1664 and 1667. However, in 1677, Charles II did issue a new charter for Liverpool, which was aimed at providing a majority of loyalists on the council, by providing for fifteen non-residents to serve on it, and to increase the power that the council would hold over the burgesses. When James II succeeded in 1685, he issued a new charter, ratifying that of Charles II, but increasing the amount of power the King could wield over the council. In 1695 William III issued a new charter, which confirmed that granted by Charles I. This remained Liverpool's basic charter until 1835 and led to the city gaining a reputation for having one of the country's least democratic local governments. The Common Council became largely confined to a small clique of successful merchant families, with membership effectively for life.⁷

We can see that the merchant and political élite in Liverpool had well-established rights and privileges, which existed throughout the period of this study and they were prepared and able to defend them. This is evinced by the official support that the town gave to the pro-slavery lobby, once the trade in slaves and institution of slavery became the targets of reform.⁸ Such support should come as no surprise. In 1750, the African Company was founded, freemen of this company providing over half the members of the Common Council. In 1787, 37 out a total of 41 councillors had extensive connections to the slave trade. Ten years later, 34 out of 38 councillors were slave ship owners, suppliers or investors. Throughout the period of organised opposition to the slave trade (1787 – 1807), all 20 mayors of Liverpool

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 46-51; G. Chandler, *Liverpool Under Charles I* (Liverpool, 1965), p. 363; M.J. Power, 'The Growth of Liverpool' in J. Belchem (ed.), *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790 – 1940* (Liverpool, 1992), p. 25.

⁷ G. Chandler, *Liverpool*, pp. 51-5; F.E. Sanderson, 'The Structure of Politics in Liverpool 1780-1807', *Transactions of the Historical Society for Lancashire and Cheshire*, 127 (1978), p. 65.

⁸ Liverpool Corporation's support for local pro-slavery propaganda is discussed below.

had been at some time either owners of slaving vessels, or holders of shares in slaving ventures.⁹

Liverpool's local government prior to the reform of Parliament was a stark contrast to Manchester's political administration, which allowed no privileges and made no recognition of the importance of the city's position on the back of the growth of the cotton industry in Lancashire.¹⁰ Interestingly, as solidly as the bulk of the political élite in the chartered and incorporated town of Liverpool backed Parliament, their counterparts in the politically unrecognised township of Manchester were loyal to the crown during the English Civil War.¹¹ Abolitionists would find themselves pitted against the political descendants of both these élite groups in Liverpool and Manchester, illustrating that political opinion and background amongst pro-slavery advocates were as diverse as the abolitionists'.

Though Liverpool had ancient foundations compared with Manchester, if not Chester or Warrington, it had only begun to grow in earnest during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gradually taking over from Warrington as the largest town on the Mersey and replacing Chester as the dominant port in the region during the eighteenth century, as the Dee estuary became increasingly difficult to navigate.¹² When John Leland visited the area in the mid-sixteenth century he found a paved town, but with only a single chapel. Further indicating Liverpool's lack of size and local importance, Leland describes the position of the township as standing not on the Mersey, but on 'Runcorn Water'. He found that Liverpool was already trading fairly

⁹ Sanderson, 'The Structure of Politics in Liverpool', pp. 65-6.

¹⁰ This is discussed in chapter 5, 'Manchester Abolitionists'.

¹¹ J.P. Earwaker (ed.), *Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester* (Manchester, 1887), pp. 283-4, in R.C. Richardson and T.C. James (eds), *The Urban Experience Sourcebook; English, Scottish and Welsh Towns, 1450 – 1700* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 93-4.

¹² Vigier, *Change and Apathy*, pp. 36, 46-7; Philips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, p. 85.

extensively with Ireland, and Manchester merchants were active in the area in an established trade in textiles, which was chiefly Irish linen.¹³

Regardless of the Port of Chester's problems, Liverpool was in any case a better site for an international seaport than the old county town of Cheshire, both in terms of its more reliable navigable channels and harbour, and the proximity to its textile-producing Lancashire hinterland. It began to take Chester's place as the major North West port in the late seventeenth century and by the middle years of the eighteenth century had all but eclipsed Cheshire's county town.¹⁴ Through significant improvements to navigable inland waterways, Liverpool served as the international hub for the manufacturing districts of Manchester, Lancashire, the West Midlands, North Wales and West Yorkshire, the chemical, tanning and salt industries of Cheshire, and the Staffordshire potteries. Liverpool's trading links quickly spread across the globe. The port's history of providing labour for the West Indies plantations, for instance, predates its involvement with the African slave trade. In 1648 an order was issued aimed at ridding Liverpool of some of its paupers, removing them to work in Barbados:

For as dyvers yong children and beggars which are much prejudiciall to the towne are found wandering and begging contrarie to lawe it is therefore ordered by the worshipfull Mr. Mayor, the aldermen and the major part of this assembly Mr. Edward Chambers [and nine other gentlemen] shall goe all through and about the towne and take their names and examine them and cause such that are fitt and able to work in the plantacions to be shipt for the Barbados or otherwise put to be apprentices if they belong to this towne.¹⁵

This process was one which continued to have currency into the eighteenth century, seemingly based upon a notion that 'liberty and rights were ... privileges of

¹³ L. Toulmin Smith (ed.), *Leland's Itinerary in England and Wales*, in 5 volumes (London, 1964), v, pp. 40–41.

¹⁴ Power, 'The Growth of Liverpool', p. 21; Vigier, *Change and Apathy*, pp. 36, 46–7; Philips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, p. 85. This is discussed in chapter 6, 'The Context for Abolition in Liverpool's and Manchester's shared Hinterland'.

¹⁵ Chandler, *Liverpool under Charles I*, pp. 411–12.

the propertied elite'.¹⁶ Although transatlantic slave trading was well underway by this time, Britain (more accurately England) had yet to make any concerted efforts to become a major participant in the triangular trade, which was then dominated by Portugal. It seemed there were currently enough poor people at home to satisfy the labour needs of the British colonists in the Caribbean. It would be 1700 before the first slave-trading vessel left Liverpool and not until the 1740s would Liverpool overtake Bristol as the centre of British transatlantic slavery, although Daniel Defoe claimed that by the 1720s the city had already overtaken its southern West coast rival. Defoe provides further evidence of Liverpool's prodigious growth during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, remarking on the consistent growth of its population in the interim periods between his visits in the 1680s, 1690s and 1720s. Defoe describes Liverpool's prosperity, asserting that 'there is no town in England, London excepted, that can equal Liverpoole for the fineness of the streets, and beauty of the buildings ... as handsomely built as London it self'.¹⁷

As the port grew in importance so did the population of Liverpool. In the early 1700s, there were fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. By 1773, the population had grown to over 34,000. At the first census of 1801, more than 77,000 people lived in the town, and by the mid 1830s, at the end of the period of British Caribbean slavery, Liverpool was very definitely a major conurbation, a city with over 200,000 inhabitants. Most of this increase came about through Lancashire and Cheshire people moving into the area, but there were also considerable numbers of Scottish, Welsh and Irish migrants.¹⁸

¹⁶ M.J. Rozbicki, 'To Save Them from Themselves: Proposals to Enslave the British Poor, 1698-1755', *Slavery and Abolition*, 22 (2001), pp. 29-50.

¹⁷ D. Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-6; reprint, London, 1971), pp. 540-43.

¹⁸ Power, 'The Growth of Liverpool', pp. 21-5.

During the late eighteenth century, Liverpool's growth in trade and population did not lead to a similarly marked increase in the area of ground it covered; it still had a relatively small footprint. The town spread for about one and a half miles along the North bank of the Mersey estuary, with urban development petering out between one and one and a half miles inland from the shore. William Moss' *Liverpool Guide* of 1796 paints a picture of a bustling and expanding commercial centre, small enough to walk around comfortably, but with no small pretensions to grandeur. In the opening paragraph of *The Guide*'s introduction, Moss, echoing Defoe's description of 70 years earlier, claims Liverpool to be 'the first town in the kingdom in point of size and commercial importance, the Metropolis excepted'. He takes his reader on a walking tour of the area, during which he illustrates its prosperity and ongoing expansion. Rodney Street and Great George street, which are now very much part of Liverpool city centre, were far from completely developed in the 1790s, the latter running through open fields on both sides. Moss tells his reader that the 'intended' Great George Street 'promises to be a good street' and that Rodney Street 'will make a very handsome street'.¹⁹

Moss is keen to present Liverpool and its prospects in a positive light, describing a polite society, an industrious population and grand additions to the local landscape. However, no mention is made in this guide of the extreme levels of poverty in the area, which had been considered to be a problem by the authorities for at least half a century and one that had continued to grow.²⁰ The growth of philanthropic activity in the area had done little to address this problem. George Chandler argues that 'there were proportionately far more poor and miserable in

¹⁹ Map of Liverpool, 1797, engraved for W. Moss, *The Liverpool Guide: First Edition: Including a Sketch of the Environs* (Liverpool, 1796; reprint, Liverpool, 1972); W. Moss, *The Liverpool Guide*, pp. 1-2, 18-19.

²⁰ See note 15 above.

Liverpool in 1801 than in 1701'. The local reformer and abolitionist, Dr James Currie, came into conflict with Liverpoolian landlords when he expressed concern at the proliferation of court and cellar dwellings.²¹ These dwellings, a response to the accommodation needs of Liverpool's growing urban working-class population were a common feature of towns of any size in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Liverpool, however, had proportionately more of this type of dwelling than other urban centres, and they were generally more cramped than their counterparts elsewhere. At the first census in 1801, more than 2,000 Liverpoolians were living in cellars and this figure would rise to around 35,000 by the end of the 1830s.²²

Moss does recognise the importance of the slave trade to Liverpool's commercial success. Though he refers to the morals of the slave trade being long a 'subject of earnest contention by the legislature and individuals of this country', he makes no explicit reference to any anti-slavery activity in the area.²³ For instance, when citing William Roscoe's poem, 'Mount Pleasant', rather than mention the famous abolitionist by name or reputation, Moss simply refers to 'a local bard'.²⁴ Further, he ignores the crux of the poem's content, which is an attack on the ethics of slavery, and the merchants of Liverpool, who had grown rich on the back of it. This poem was written in 1771 when Roscoe was aged nineteen, but was not published until 1777 by J. Johnson & S. Crane, who were also publishers for such reforming notables as Joseph Priestly, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Cowper. Expressing views, which would have been considered unorthodox, if not dangerously revolutionary, Roscoe refers to the commerce on which Liverpool had grown as a

²¹ I. Sellers, 'William Roscoe, the Roscoe Circle and Radical Politics in Liverpool, 1787-1807', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 120 (1968), p. 53.

²² Moss, *Liverpool Guide*, pp. 96-7; Chandler, *Liverpool*, p. 407; R. Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain 1780-1914* (London, 1989), pp. 31-2. C. Aspin, *The First Industrial Society: Lancashire 1750 - 1850* (Preston, 1995), pp. 133-4.

²³ Moss, *Liverpool Guide*, p. 100.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 23.

‘bloated monster’ and damns both the city of Liverpool and the country at large for the wrongs committed against Africans.²⁵

We might expect Moss to represent dominant orthodox views in *The Guide*, and indeed we can see he makes only a very qualified criticism of the slave trade and slavery, ‘As a simple moral question, considered in the abstract, it can meet with no countenance. In a political point of view, every thing favours it’. Having made this statement, Moss then defends slavery by recourse to sentiments familiar to his reader—specifically, economics, religion and the inferiority of the African: asking ‘will the enlightened and refined European say, why his creator doomed the mind of the African to remain as dark and naked as his body?’ Finally, Moss excuses the slave trade on the grounds that slavery had always existed in one form or another and by stating that ‘the ignorance of the African slave makes him unconscious of being so’.²⁶

Liverpool was not just a major slave trading port; it was actually at the centre of the transatlantic slave trade, with a direct and dominant involvement in each leg of the triangular trade. Many of the vessels used to transport the slaves across the Atlantic were built on the Mersey, registered at Liverpool and owned by Liverpoolian merchant companies or partnerships. Further, in addition to importing slave-produced sugar and tobacco, Liverpool was also the conduit for the slave-grown raw materials, which supplied the rapidly growing Lancashire cotton industry, and which in turn were in large quantities exported via the city to the west coast of Africa to purchase slaves and other goods.

²⁵ G. Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool 1753-1831* (London, 1953), pp. xxiii, 330-42; D.A. Macnaughton, ‘Roscoe, William’, in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, 60 vols (Oxford 2004), 47, pp. 736-7; B. Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (London, 1984), pp. 20-21.

²⁶ Moss, *Liverpool Guide*, pp. 99-104.

In the light of Liverpool's centrality to the trade in slaves and in slave produced materials, anti-slavery was never likely to be a majority position in the city. An examination of the part played by organised abolitionists and the activities of various individuals in the city ought to provide important evidence to illustrate the forces at work, which influenced how anti-slavery arguments were framed in this particular context, and how perceived self-interest and ethical issues were prioritised, promoted, or protected.

There are a variety of views concerning the role played by Liverpool abolitionists in the campaigns against slavery and the slave trade. It has been claimed that abolitionist activity in the city mirrored that in the rest of the country, that the campaign in Liverpool was 'in miniature analogous' to that in the rest of the country.²⁷ Conversely, one could easily conclude that, especially prior to 1807, there was minimal abolitionist activity in the city and that since the bulk of Liverpoolians' livelihoods was linked in some way to the trade in slaves and slave-grown goods, any anti-slavery movements would easily be stifled. This is attested by J. Wallace, who stated in 1795, 'Almost every man in Liverpool is a merchant, and he who cannot send a bale will send a band-box ... almost every order of people is interested in a Guinea cargo'.²⁸

Nevertheless, we can see that in the later campaign for emancipation, from the 1820s to 1834, there was a good deal of organised activity in Liverpool. The Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (The Liverpool Society) was active from 1822, and operating in allegiance with, but independently from the

²⁷ J. Tripp, 'Liverpool Movement for the Abolition', *Journal of Negro History*, 13 (1928), pp. 265-85, cited in Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', p. 197.

²⁸ J. Wallace, *A General and Descriptive History of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Liverpool ... together with a Circumstantial Account of the True Causes of its Extensive African Trade* (Liverpool, 1795), pp. 229-30, cited in Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 37.

London Committee.²⁹ As the number of women's organisations across the country grew, the Liverpool Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association, an auxiliary to the national Anti-Slavery Society, was founded in the city in 1827, with James Cropper's female relatives playing a central role in it.³⁰ Pro-slavery advocates' propaganda provides further evidence of the effectiveness of abolitionism from Liverpool in the later campaign. In 1825, Liverpool abolitionist, James Cropper, was charged by James McQueen (along with Thomas Clarkson and *The Edinburgh Review*) with making 'calumnies and misrepresentations' against the West Indian colonies.³¹ McQueen's inclusion of Cropper's name alongside Clarkson's shows that not only was abolitionism formalised and coherent in Liverpool during the early 1820s, but also that, by the middle of the decade, at least one of the city's campaigners had achieved a high degree of prominence.

National publication and recognition of an outspoken Quaker merchant, with extensive East Indian interests and the existence of the Liverpool Society and Ladies' Association, do not necessarily indicate a bustle of abolitionist agitation in the city. They do nevertheless suggest that Liverpool abolitionists, at least in the later campaigns, may have been more effective than previously credited, and indeed that the city had taken the lead to some extent as a centre of anti-slavery propaganda activity. It will therefore be important to ascertain whether there was any effective organised activity in Liverpool during the earlier campaigns against the slave trade,

²⁹ D.B. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement 1821-1823', *Journal of Negro History*, 45 (1981), p. 253.

³⁰ *Declaration of the Objects of The Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery*, 25 March 1822, NMGM, D/CR/11/15; C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery, The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London, 1992), p. 47. Cropper's activities are discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4, 'James Cropper's Rise to Prominence' and 'The Impolicy of Slavery: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

³¹ J. McQueen, *The West India Colonies; the Calumnies and Misrepresentations Circulated Against Them by The Edinburgh Review, Mr Clarkson, Mr Cropper, &c. &c. Examined and Refuted*, (London 1825).

which paved the way for later abolitionists from the city to achieve the levels of prominence they did in the emancipation campaigns of the 1820s and 1830s.

The anonymous author of the 1884 publication, *Liverpool and Slavery: An Historical Account of the Liverpool-African Slave Trade* argues that there was very little abolitionist activity in the city during the first campaigns in the 1780s, and claims that perhaps only two abolitionists were active there in the very early years of organised anti-slavery. When the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade's 1787 list of names first arrived in Liverpool in 1788 (the year following its formation), only two Liverpool names, William Rathbone III and Dr Jonathon Binns, were added. The author implicitly supports this claim for a low level of activity by concentrating much of the chapter devoted to 'The Abolition List – Liverpool Names ...' on the outpourings of Liverpoolian anti-abolitionists, which were mainly directed not at campaigners in the city, but rather at the Manchester Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.³² It seems that unlike their Liverpoolian counterparts, Mancunian abolitionists were making their presence felt across the region and further afield, and enjoyed considerable popular support in their home city. This was despite Manchester's own obvious economic connections with the slave trade and slave-grown produce. The contrast seems very stark indeed; two Liverpoolians initially subscribed to the 'abolition list', while more than 10,000 people signed Manchester's 1787 abolitionist petition to Parliament.³³

Perhaps the successful mobilisation of the pro-slavery lobby in Liverpool can account for the disparity between the two cities' contributions to the first wave of organised agitation against the slave trade. An example of this opposition to abolitionism is the pamphlet published by the adopted Liverpoolian pro-slavery

³² Anonymous, *Liverpool and Slavery: An Historical Account of the Liverpool-African Slave Trade* (Liverpool 1884; reprint, Liverpool, 1984), pp. 76-7.

³³ H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (London, 1994), p. 90.

writer, Rev. Raymond Harris (the *nom de plume* employed by Spanish Jesuit émigré, Raimundo Hormoza) in March 1788.³⁴ In June 1788, Harris received £100 from Liverpool City Council to whom he had dedicated his *Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade*. His claim, that the slave trade had ‘the positive sanction of the Divine Authority’ was a direct counter to those arguments used by abolitionists, whose opposition to slavery was underpinned by their Christian beliefs, and as such his *Scriptural Researches* demanded a strong response. Within a year, six replies to Harris’ work had been published, including one rebuttal commissioned by the London-based Abolition Committee, and published anonymously by William Roscoe.³⁵ This suggests that Liverpool abolitionists were comparatively thin on the ground and faced a stern challenge from the city’s pro-slavery lobby for popular support. However, there is also evidence (considered below) that there may have been considerably more abolitionist activity and open support for the anti-slavery cause in the city than considered by the author of *Liverpool and Slavery*.

The 1788 list of subscribers to the Society for Abolition suggests that the early campaign did at least have some relatively prominent supporters in Liverpool. In addition to Rathbone and Binns, another six Liverpudlians (all members of the informal reform group known as the Roscoe circle) had also subscribed to the Society: Daniel Daulby, William Rathbone Junior, William Roscoe, William Wallace, Rev. John Yates and an anonymous subscriber. We may safely conclude that this anonymous subscriber was Wallace’s son in law, the Scottish physician, Dr James Currie; a former tobacco merchant in Virginia and another member of the Roscoe

³⁴ R. Harris, *Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade, Shewing its Conformity With Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion Delineated in the Sacred Writings of God* (Liverpool, 1788), reprinted in P. Kitson (ed.), *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*, 4 vols (London, 1999), ii, pp. 283-323.

³⁵ P. Kitson, ‘Introduction to R. Harris, *Scriptural Researches*’, in Kitson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, pp. 281-2.

circle.³⁶ Despite their unsuccessful attempts to form an anti-slavery society in Liverpool, and the fact that they were active agitators for reform and open subscribers to the Society for Abolition, members of the Roscoe circle were nevertheless often cautious about adopting a public anti-slavery stance.³⁷ Though the detailed information about the trade that they passed on to the London Committee was considered useful, their reticence and the lack of petition signatories from Liverpool suggests that they did not receive a level of support comparable with that enjoyed by the abolitionist cause in Manchester.

The obvious difficulties faced by those who wished to deprive the city of the profits from the lucrative Africa Trade could well be expected to have produced muted and compromised arguments from the anti-slavery lobby within Liverpool. Indeed, for reasons of self-preservation (physically and economically), abolitionists were perhaps keen to avoid attracting attention to themselves in a city with such a numerous, active and potentially violent pro-slavery lobby.³⁸ It ought to be noted here that though Liverpool's reputation for disorder did not match that of Manchester, there were many instances of violence at elections and other political events in the city.³⁹ In this context, it could be seen as a wise strategy not to argue too forcibly and publicly for anti-slavery policies in a city where profits from the Africa Trade could be seen to represent 'an influx of wealth which, perhaps, no consideration would induce a commercial community to relinquish'.⁴⁰ As well as their disagreements with

³⁶ Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool 1753 - 1831*, p. 65; Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', pp. 198-9; M. DeLacy, 'Currie, James', in Matthew and Harrison (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 14, pp. 744-6.

³⁷ D. Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London 1991), pp. 161-2; Kitson, Introduction to R. Harris, *Scriptural Researches* in Kitson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, p. 281; F.E. Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', p. 198.

³⁸ J. Walvin, *Black Ivory, A History of British Slavery* (London, 1993), p. 302.

³⁹ A. Bryson, 'Riotous Liverpool' in Belchem, *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour*, pp. 98-135; F.E. Sanderson, 'The Structure of Politics in Liverpool', pp. 78-9.

⁴⁰ 'The Liverpool Slave Trade' *The Commercial World and Journal of Transport*, 4 March 1893, pp. 8-10, cited in Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 64.

the Liverpool Corporation and opposition to slavery, the Roscoe circle were famed locally for their support of the French Revolution (for which they were dubbed ‘Liverpool Jacobins’), for the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, and for free trade with the East Indies.⁴¹ These reformist, free-trade positions could potentially have made the members of the circle vulnerable to attacks from various parties, who perceived their hitherto protected interests to be threatened by the group’s political agenda. For instance the Mayor and Recorder for the city had 10,000 copies of an anti-Jacobin tract printed. This publication, which was known as *The Resolutions*, reflected similar loyalist sympathies to those expressed so violently in Manchester during the 1780s and 1790s.⁴² It implicitly encouraged Liverpudlians to carry out acts of violence against the city’s leading reformers. Evidence of popular enmity, or at least the attempt to mobilise such feelings, against the Roscoe circle in the area can be found in an unpublished political ballad, which also underlines the circle’s fame:

But unluckily then in the Town
 Attorneys were great politicians
 And Quakers were men of renown
 And merchants were metaphysicians ...
 A state without rulers they’d rule
 And vote me and a negro relations.⁴³

By a relatively subtle combination and exaggeration of their anti-slavery, anti-authoritarianism stances and involvement in local political affairs, the anonymous balladeer is attacking the political and ethical stances of Roscoe, the ballad’s attorney, and the father and son, William Rathbone III and William Rathbone IV, the ballad’s

⁴¹ Sellers, ‘William Roscoe, the Roscoe Circle and Radical Politics in Liverpool, 1787-1807’, pp. 45-8, 51.

⁴² This is discussed in chapter 5, ‘Manchester Abolitionists’.

⁴³ Unpublished ballad (n.d.), uncatalogued item in Roscoe Papers, cited in G. Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool*, p. 52; Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization*, pp. 30-31.

Quaker merchants, although the latter of these was later disowned by the sect.⁴⁴ The verse also illustrates the author's perceptions of his audience's racist and anti-Dissent views, and importantly their anti Jacobinism, pandering to these fears and creating a view of the Roscoe circle as dangerous revolutionaries.⁴⁵

Public arguments against the slave trade could potentially cause considerable trouble. As members of the social élite in a relatively small city, most of the chief local protagonists on both sides of the abolition debate would inevitably come across each other in the course of their everyday business. Recent work has suggested that the Liverpool slave trading community were connected through a series of 'friendship links' and we could perhaps argue that the city's elite interacted with each other to some extent along similar informal lines.⁴⁶ For instance, Roscoe's business partner was Thomas Leyland, who had made his fortune in the slave trade. Roscoe was also a close associate of the Earle family, who were prominent Liverpool African traders.⁴⁷ Roscoe was also involved with the Charitable Institution House along with John Gladstone, a prominent defender of slavery and Chairman of the Liverpool West Indian Association, who would conduct a public debate on the question of slavery with James Cropper in the Liverpool press in 1823-4.⁴⁸ Fellow subscribers to the Society for Abolition, William Rathbone III and his son William Rathbone IV, had social and formal business connections with members of both sides of the slave trade debate. William III was an active and prominent member of the local Quaker community. His son, William IV, in turn became a member of the Society of Friends,

⁴⁴ See footnote 59 below.

⁴⁵ Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization*, p. 31.

⁴⁶ B. Refford, 'Merchant Friends and the Social Construction of the Mid Eighteenth-Century Liverpool Slave Trade', paper delivered at *Port Cities: British Society and Maritime Culture* conference, Regional History Centre UWE Bristol, 17 Sep 2005.

⁴⁷ Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ This is discussed in chapter 4, '*The Impolicy of Slavery*', James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

but broke from them after he publicly criticised religious intolerance on the part of other Quakers in 1801.⁴⁹ Despite their open opposition to the slave trade, the Rathbone family's shipping and commission business continued to owe a great deal of its success to trading in American cotton, and they too were closely associated with the Earles, who regularly enjoyed the Rathbones' famous hospitality.⁵⁰

Similarly, Roscoe circle member and abolitionist, James Currie, Liverpool's 'most popular physician' and a nationally recognised writer on medicine, enjoyed a prominent position within local society and was even made a freeman of the borough in 1802 for his services to the town.⁵¹ It would be interesting to examine Currie's position in the early years of abolitionism, in order to gain some idea of the way the abolition debate was conducted in Liverpool and some inkling of the particular pressures to which abolitionists in Liverpool were subjected, which perhaps prevented them from emulating their Mancunian counterparts' success. We may perhaps question the level of his devotion to the abolitionist cause, as his connection to the Roscoe circle seems to have come about through his marriage to William Wallace's daughter. Although Currie's subscription to the Society for Abolition in 1788 amounted to £2-2/- (only William Rathbone Senior of the Liverpool subscribers contributed a higher sum), he made this contribution anonymously. Nevertheless, Currie anonymously published tracts against the slave trade and seemed concerned by the campaign's lack of progress. The level of Currie's prominence in abolitionist circles and commitment to the cause can perhaps be seen in his correspondence with William Wilberforce. Wilberforce certainly considered him to be an active and

⁴⁹ J. Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade 1783-1807* (London, 1997), p. 95.

⁵⁰ Introduction to *The Rathbone Papers*, Special Collections and Archives, University of Liverpool Library; Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', pp. 200-201, 232-3; Chandler, *Liverpool*, p. 408; A. Gordon and M.W. Kirby, 'Rathbone, William' in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 46, p.103.

⁵¹ P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People England 1727-1783* (London, 1989), p. 639; Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', pp. 203-4.

important figure in the movement; the M.P. reassured Currie over the progress of the campaign in 1790, and felt moved to chide him for his public, though anonymous, criticism of the government's failure to abolish the slave trade in a pamphlet of 1793.⁵²

Despite his local position (or perhaps because of it) and the cause's hitherto slow progress, it seems that Currie was fairly optimistic about the prospects for abolition and felt secure about abolitionists' social and political security in Liverpool, more so than many of his contemporaries would claim. In a private letter of 1788, Currie bemoaned the antagonism that the debate about the slave trade had caused in the city. Nevertheless, he felt that the debate was necessary and that frank discussion of the subject would bring about the slave trade's abolition:

Much good, I am persuaded, will be done by the discussion of the subject ...
Let there be but agitation of any question, and the interests of truth and virtue are promoted.⁵³

It is interesting that Currie expressed these views in a private correspondence. Perhaps the true extent of his optimism and confidence can be found in his anonymous subscription to the Society for Abolition, despite his assertion that the issue of abolition needed to be publicly discussed. The anonymous 1788 publication of *The African*, a sentimental poetic description of a dying slave, written by Currie and 'tidied up' by William Roscoe to render it publishable, is further evidence of Currie's reluctance to publicise his anti-slavery views.⁵⁴ Like Roscoe, Currie was a prominent man in Liverpool, who would certainly have been associated with participants in, and supporters of the slave trade. He bemoans the 'unhappiness'

⁵² William Wilberforce, personal correspondence to James Currie, 11 Nov 1790, 13 April 1793, cited in J. Pollock, *Wilberforce* (London, 1977), pp. 104, 123.

⁵³ Personal correspondence of James Currie, cited in Anonymous, *Liverpool and Slavery*, pp. 89-90.

⁵⁴ J. Currie and W. Roscoe, 'The African', published anonymously as 'The Negroe's Complaint' in *The World* (1788), amended and published as 'The African' in *Carlton-House Magazine* (April, 1793), reprinted in Richardson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*: vol. 4 Verse (London, 1999), pp. 99-100.

caused by the ‘struggle between interest and humanity’ in diplomatic terms, couched to cause no offence.⁵⁵ His view of the state of the contemporary debate in Liverpool is at odds with that which claims that there was very little activity in the early stages of the campaign against the trade and that Liverpoolian abolitionists were vulnerable to attack. It seems that the matter was being widely discussed and strong positions on both sides of the argument were being adopted, apparently with little or no untoward friction.

Tellingly, though he condemns the trade in slaves as a ‘gross violation of the principles of justice’, Curries does not personally condemn those who made their living (either directly or indirectly) from it. For the same reason that he bemoans their ‘unhappiness’, he regards their position with a degree of sympathy, as well he might, since they would be his neighbours, business associates and movers in the same social circles. It appears that Currie’s dedication to abolitionism did not quite run to open criticism of his fellow Liverpoolians, or that he was unwilling to compromise his own local position by extending his arguments to their logical conclusion. Either way, the evidence that this letter provides is somewhat contradictory. He asserts that there was a lively and open debate in the city, bemoans the campaign’s slow progress and criticises the government’s failings, but seems reticent about making his own stance public and falls short of making a forcible and convincing argument for abolition. A complex picture is presented here of how abolitionists and the cause of abolitionism were received and perceived in Liverpool in the late 1780s.

To clarify this picture, we need to take account of the activities of other Liverpoolian abolitionists. There were activists, who were not subscribers to the Society for Abolition in the late 1780s, but who gained some degree of notice for their

⁵⁵ Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization*, p. 24.

abolitionist stance: for instance, the Rev. William Shepherd (a Unitarian minister, who was absent from Liverpool during 1788), the radical blind poet, newspaper editor, bookseller and founder of the Liverpool School for the Blind, Edward Rushton and the Anglican cleric, Rev. Henry Dannel. Dannel, like Roscoe, but under his own name, published a pamphlet in 1788, which attacked Harris' *Scriptural Researches*.⁵⁶ For Dannel to put his own name to such a text may with some justification be deemed an act of considerable courage. As an Anglican priest, his living was in the gift of the strongly pro-slavery Liverpool Corporation, the common council of which had an overwhelming majority of lifelong members with a slave trading interest. This was the body to whom Harris' work was dedicated and who had paid him £100 for it. Despite this however, Dannel does not appear to have suffered for openly publishing his pamphlet. Nor does he seem to have suffered by his association with the extreme radical, Edward Rushton, whose plan to establish a school for the blind in Liverpool he helped bring to fruition. Perhaps Dannel's position was protected to some extent by the anti-slavery views of the Bishop of Chester, Beilby Porteus, within whose See Liverpool still lay.⁵⁷

Edward Rushton had been employed in the slave trade, and had contracted the opthalmia that caused his blindness on his final voyage to the West Indies. According to his biographer, the Rev. William Shepherd, there was an outbreak of the disease amongst the slaves on the Middle Passage, and since the other officers refused to enter the holds Rushton treated the slaves himself. He returned to Liverpool

⁵⁶ H. Dannel, *A Particular Examination of Mr. Harris's 'Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave-Trade'* (Liverpool, 1788).

⁵⁷ Porteus' anti-slavery position and activities are discussed below and in chapter 7, 'The Political Life of Dr Beilby Porteus'.

completely blind, though his sight returned in one eye after a series of operations in 1805.⁵⁸

Whilst we may exercise some caution accepting the complete veracity of Shepherd's version of his associate's life, it seems that, in common with fellow Liverpoolian trader turned abolitionist, John Newton (who had long since left the city), Rushton's experience of the trade led him to take up the anti-slavery cause. Both men, once invalided out of the trade reflected with a good deal of regret on their involvement in it.⁵⁹ Rushton wrote his first anti-slavery poem in 1782. Having for the most part lived in near poverty until the last few years of his life, he made no secret of his abolitionist position and seemed not to suffer too severely for it, although his controversial opinions on other issues did cause him considerable trouble. It has been claimed that he escaped persecution because of his blindness, but this seems an unlikely expression of humanitarian sentiment on the part of the pro-slavery authorities. In any case, Rushton was no stranger to attention from the authorities. As a newspaper editor and writer, he had attracted censure with his outspoken views, particularly concerning the French Revolution. His brief spell as editor of *The Liverpool Herald* during the 1780s, characterised by his regular attacks on the national government and the Liverpool Corporation, came to an end after he wrote an imprudent article about the activities of the press gang in the city.⁶⁰ Pressure was brought to bear on the paper's proprietor and Rushton, who refused to print a retraction, was forced to resign from his position. Underlining his commitment and

⁵⁸ M.J. Royden, *Pioneers and Perseverance, A History of the Royal School for the Blind, Liverpool 1791-1991* (Liverpool, 1991), pp. 26-8; B. Hunter, *Forgotten Hero: The Life and Times of Edward Rushton, Liverpool's Blind Poet, Revolutionary Republican & Anti-Slavery Fighter* (Liverpool, 2002), pp. 6-7, 102-3; W. Shepherd, *The Life of Edward Rushton* (Liverpool, 1824), pp. x, xii-xiv; Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 48, pp. 164-5; Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', pp. 204-7.

⁵⁹ Richardson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, p. 30; B. Martin and M. Spurrell (eds), *The journal of a slave trader (John Newton), 1750-1754, With Newton's Thoughts Upon the African slave Trade, 1788* (London 1962) p. 99.

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, there are no known surviving copies of the paper.

tenacity, Rushton then published a ballad about the press gang, ‘Will Clewline’, which was sold in the streets of Liverpool.⁶¹

Rushton’s abolitionist stance was considerably more forthright than that of many of the wealthier middle-class abolitionists. Indeed, William Roscoe censured him for his excessive zeal, claiming it was an unwise stance tactically and unjust to honest merchants who had much invested in the slave system. Such was Rushton’s disdain of his more celebrated colleagues’ timidity, he refused help from Roscoe and William Rathbone, when he was experiencing severe financial difficulties in the 1790s. However, Rushton’s poem *West Indian Eclogues*, which, seemingly rather incongruously, was dedicated to an even more moderate abolitionist, the anti-reformist Bishop of Chester, Dr Beilby Porteus (a ‘Wilberforce man’), attracted the attention and approbation of the more steadfast Thomas Clarkson. On his visit to Liverpool in 1787, Clarkson sought out Rushton and spent a number of hours in discussions with him.⁶²

In common with other poetical works of this type, Rushton’s *West Indian Eclogues* describes a somewhat idyllic Africa, the home from which the slaves are taken. However, in *West Indian Eclogues*, Rushton does not offer the more usual patronising *benign* racist view of the slaves as innocent, passive *creatures*, but invests them with full human agency and identity. This is a reflection of Rushton’s anti-racist stance, which, though his views were shared by a number of activists across the country and in his home region, separates him from many of his abolitionist allies. In a similar vein to the more celebrated William Cowper, rather than depicting a docile

⁶¹ Hunter, *Forgotten Hero*, p. 59; Royden, *Pioneers and Perseverance*, p. 30; Shepherd, *The Life of Edward Rushton* (Liverpool, 1824), pp. xv-xxiv; Sanderson, ‘The Liverpool Abolitionists’, p. 205.

⁶² Hunter, *Forgotten Hero*, pp. 31-2; M. Royden, *Pioneers and Perseverance*, p. 30; W. Shepherd, *The Life of Edward Rushton* (Liverpool, 1824), pp. xv-xxiv; Sanderson, ‘The Liverpool Abolitionists’, p. 205. Porteus’ activities are discussed in chapter 6 ‘The context for abolitionism in Liverpool’s and Manchester’s Shared Hinterland’ and chapter 7 ‘The Political Life of Beilby Porteus’.

innocent people, Rushton portrays Africans as intelligent, eloquent, aware of their position and very much resentful of it, with The *Eclogues*' two central characters discussing how to achieve both their freedom and revenge.⁶³

We can perhaps see some clever political manoeuvring on Rushton's behalf in dedicating this work to such a conservative abolitionist as Porteus. In addition to using the bishop's greater fame and political connections to gain a wider audience for his work, he may have been sending a message to the Liverpool Corporation (who had considerable power over Rushton's friends, the Revs. Dannet and Shepherd as their parishes were in the Corporation's gift), by claiming allegiance to a higher power in the local Anglican hierarchy, the head of the Diocese. Despite some clear political differences, Rushton accords Porteus high praise in the *Eclogues* explanatory notes. Explaining why his work is dedicated to Dr Porteus, he refers to the Bishop of Chester as 'that most exemplary prelate' and describes Porteus' work as:

A discourse, in which the clearness of the understanding, is only to be surpassed by the goodness of the heart, of the preacher; a discourse which abounds in philanthropy, and enforces humanity upon the most powerful motives, because it is dictated by the genuine principles of the Christian Religion.⁶⁴

However, he does take his dedicatee to task for his view of Africans' moral and intellectual capabilities. In a sermon of 1783 Porteus argued:

Being heathens, not only in their hearts but in their lives, and knowing no distinction between vice and virtue, they give themselves up freely to the grossest immoralities, without being even conscious they are doing wrong.⁶⁵

⁶³ Edward Rushton, *West Indian Eclogues* (1787), reprinted in Richardson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, pp. 31-54.

⁶⁴ Edward Rushton, Explanatory notes to *West Indian Eclogues*, in Richardson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, Volume 4, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁵ B. Porteus, 'Civilization, improvement, and conversion of the Negro slaves in the British West-India islands recommended. Preached before the incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, February 23, 1783', cited by E. Rushton in *Ibid.* pp. 61-2; and in R. Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, Volume II, pp. 396-8. This sermon is discussed in chapter 7, 'The Political Life of Dr Beilby Porteus'.

Rushton cites this very extract to illustrate that the ‘desire of revenge is an impetuous, a ruling passion’ in minds of the slaves. However, he counters the bishop’s more general racial position, by referring to the courage of Jamaican slaves who fought for the British against the Spanish; their former masters and stating ‘many instances might be adduced to show that some Negroes are capable of kind, nay even heroic actions’, before briefly recounting how his own life was saved at sea by a ‘brave’ and ‘generous’ African, who lost his own life saving Rushton’s.⁶⁶

In the light of these differing views of Africans’ humanity, perhaps the reference to the ‘genuine principles of the Christian Religion’ is a more barbed comment than it may first appear, subtly suggesting to the poem’s readership that adherence to Christian principles ought to lead to holding a view more akin to that of the radical Rushton, than to the bishop’s racist and conservative position. Rushton did have direct experience of the trade and had had close contact with African people; Porteus had no such first hand knowledge.

A case could also be made for Rushton recognising a residual deference towards traditional figures and institutions of authority amongst his potential readership and dedicating his work to the Bishop of Chester could prevent that deference being antagonised or threatened. This was a tactic not uncommonly employed by radical agitators. Over fifty years later, the radical Chartist publications, *The Charter* and *The Operative*, used the same ploy in their pages, making the most of that cause’s aristocratic supporters, their lineage and the connections they enjoyed, which could be utilised by the Chartist movement.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Edward Rushton, Explanatory notes to *West Indian Eclogues*, in Richardson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, pp. 59-62

⁶⁷ O.R. Ashton and P.A. Pickering, *Friends of the People, Uneasy radicals in the Age of the Chartists* (London, 2002), p. 56.

Rushton also wrote in praise of the American Revolution, but when he realised that the new republic was not about to set its slaves free he composed a poem, 'American Independency' which asked, 'How can you enjoy peace, while one foot of your land is disgraced by the toil of a slave?' finishing the poem with the assertion that 'Whate'er be man's TENETS his FORTUNE his HUE, he is a man and shall be free'.⁶⁸ There is no trace here of the sense of the Africans' inferiority, which can be found in much of the work of Rushton's abolitionist colleagues. It is interesting to compare Rushton's view of American slavery with that of James Cropper, or at least those arguments Cropper made in public.⁶⁹ Whilst Cropper's public ambivalence towards American plantations left him open to accusations of hypocrisy from pro-slavery advocates, Rushton's more forthright stance (as stated above) attracted criticism from within abolitionist ranks. Rushton's arguments would perhaps appeal to an audience perceiving itself to be denied liberty, to radical republican revolutionaries, and in all likelihood to very few others, whereas Cropper's commercial argument, which somewhat blurs the American question, was calculated to appeal to capitalist and especially industrial capitalist self-interest. This leaves Rushton out in the cold to some extent and leads to the perhaps natural conclusion that his arguments were too extreme to attract much support. Whilst this may be true of potential middle class support, Rushton's ideas were beginning to appeal to elements of the growing urban working class, who were also beginning to flex their political muscles. His consistent adherence to the principles of liberty and his tenacity

⁶⁸ Edward. Rushton, 'American Independency', in W. Shepherd (ed.), *Poems and Other Writings by the Late Edward Rushton. To Which is Added a Sketch of the Life of the Author* (London, 1824), pp. 38-40, cited in Hunter, *Forgotten Hero*, pp. 10, 47; Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization*, pp. 25-6.

⁶⁹ This is discussed below and in chapter 4, 'The Impolicy of slavery: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

in publishing his views mark him out as significant contributor to the abolitionist campaign.

Rushton's non-racist outlook is further underlined by his support of the Haitian Revolution. His enlightened attitude is a stark contrast to that of abolitionists in the 1820s, who were prepared to pander to those who feared the existence of a free black population in the Caribbean, the futile attempt at prevention of which had cost the lives of many thousands of British soldiers.⁷⁰ We can perhaps conclude that adherence to ideological principals, if not solely humanitarian factors, rather than those of economic expediency drove his motivation for abolition.

Rushton's position on American independence is an illustration of his strong commitment to the ideals of liberty, which could isolate him from conservatives and the majority of reformers alike. In 1796, he wrote to George Washington:

It will generally be admitted, Sir, and perhaps with justice, that the great family of mankind were nevermore benefited by the military abilities of any individual, than by those which you displayed during the memorable American contest ... By the flame which you have kindled, every oppressed nation will be enabled to perceive its fetters; and when man once knows that he is enslaved, the business of emancipation is half performed

... But it is not to the Commander in chief of the American forces, nor to the President of the United States, that I have aught to address. My business is with George Washington of Mount Vernon in Virginia, a man who, notwithstanding his hatred of oppression and his ardent love of liberty holds at this moment hundreds of his fellow beings in a state of abject bondage ... you who conquered under the banners of freedom ... who are now the first magistrate of a free people are (strange to relate) a slave-holder ... That you, I say, should continue to be a slave holder, a proprietor of human flesh and blood creates in many of your British friends both astonishment and regret ... Your friend Jefferson has endeavoured to shew that the Negroes are an inferior order of beings; but surely you will not have recourse to such a subterfuge.

... Would you have the virtue to applaud so just and animating a movement as a revolt of your southern Negroes? No! I fear both you and your countrymen would imitate the ... British cabinet and ... scatter among an unoffending people, terror, desolation, and death. ... Shame! Shame! That man should be deemed the property of man or that the name of Washington should be found among the list of such proprietors

⁷⁰ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938; reprint, London, 2001), pp. 184-5; R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London, 1988), pp. 231-3, 246-56.

... Ages to come will read with Astonishment that the man who was foremost to wrench the rights of America from the tyrannical grasp of Britain was among the last to relinquish his own oppressive hold of poor unoffending Negroes.

In the name of justice what can induce you thus to tarnish your own well-earned celebrity and to impair the fair features of American liberty with so foul and indelible a blot. Avarice is said to be the vice of age. Your slaves [might be] worth fifteen to twenty thousand pounds. Now, sir, are you sure that your unwillingness ... to liberate your Negroes does not proceed from some lurking pecuniary considerations? ... If this be the case, and there are those who firmly believe it is, then ... [your] present reputation, future fame, and all that is estimable among the virtuous, are, for a few thousand pieces of paltry yellow dirt, irredemiably [*sic*] renounced.⁷¹

This letter provides ample evidence of Rushton's commitment to ideas of liberty for all. He praises Washington for freeing America from Britain's yoke, which was not a view likely to endear him to the social and political élite at home. He credits Washington with furthering the cause of liberty, telling him that his achievements would be an inspiration to oppressed peoples elsewhere in the world. However, in a relatively sophisticated argument and using some dramatic language, he separates Washington's role in America's War of Independence and his status as a slave owner and uses the former as frame to emphasise the latter. By constantly juxtaposing his revolutionary credentials with his position as an oppressor, Rushton undermines Washington's reputation deeming it worth only the tainted financial gains to be made from his slave ownership.

Having chided Washington and subtly warned him that the processes leading to his slaves' emancipation were already underway, since they were aware of their enslavement, Rushton then makes a calculatingly insulting accusation. Further dismissing Washington's revolutionary kudos, Rushton claims that Washington and other like-minded Americans would 'imitate' the brutal oppression that the British

⁷¹ Edward Rushton, correspondence to George Washington, in Hunter, *Forgotten Hero*, pp. 107 - 113; Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization*, p. 26.

Government had shown revolutionary Americans, should the slaves in the South carry out their own revolt, which he clearly thought they would.

Clearly Rushton was opposed to the institution of slavery in both Caribbean and mainland American plantations. Far from appealing to racist perceptions, Rushton attacks them, dismissing the notion that Africans were in some way inferior as a 'subterfuge', which he hoped was beneath Washington. There are also no 'pecuniary considerations' lurking within his arguments. There are no promises of increased productivity or prosperity, no appeals to the desires of the beneficiaries of free trade. Once again we can see that Rushton's motivations did not rest on the preservation or promotion of his personal self-interest, but on the furtherance of his (we may say now) laudable political goals and, given the means by which he contracted opthalmia, genuine humanitarianism.

By not moderating his arguments, they would never be likely to achieve any success in converting to the anti-slavery cause those people who held broadly orthodox positions and we may perhaps be justified in accusing Rushton of a certain amount of political naivety, or at least lacking a little guile. However, given that he was an overtly radical, revolutionary republican, Rushton did not intend to appeal to orthodox thinkers, in order to obtain some small concession. His opposition to slavery was part of a broader, clearly defined political stance, and his arguments took the form of a well considered polemic, which contrast quite starkly with many of his colleagues' diluted, fudged, or commercially oriented positions. Further, as stated above, Rushton's choice of the Bishop of Chester as the dedicatee of *West Indian Eclogues* and his explanations for so doing suggest that he was far from lacking in political guile.

Rushton's solid commitment to ideas of liberty for all is further illustrated by his criticism of Thomas Paine. After Washington's dismissal of his letter to him, Rushton wrote to Thomas Paine, suggesting that they campaign together against American slavery. He was to be disappointed once again, however, as Paine rejected the idea. Whilst Rushton admired Paine's publications and their contribution to the struggle for liberty, he concluded that despite his role in abolishing slavery in Pennsylvania in 1780, Paine's commitment to freedom extended only to 'white slaves'.⁷² Rushton's criticism of this lack of commitment on Paine's part adds to the sense of incongruity of his dedicating *West Indian Eclogues* to Beilby Porteus, whose disagreement with the author of *The Rights of Man* came from entirely the opposite political perspective.⁷³

It is interesting to contrast this forthright public opposition to slavery with that of James Cropper. Cropper's own comparatively steadfast anti-slavery stance was at least until the early 1830s tempered by his apparent relative tolerance of slavery on mainland American plantations. His position is also a little confused because of his argument that future freedom and prosperity, including that of the West Indian plantation workers, would be largely reliant on the Lancashire textile industry, which of course depended to a great extent on slave grown cotton from the United States.⁷⁴

Perhaps Rushton's lack of social prominence protected him from censure to some degree; he was after all by no means a member of the city's élite, or it could be the case that Liverpool abolitionists' vulnerability to attack and persecution has been overstated. Given the experiences of the Rathbones, who may have been protected by their social status, and Rushton and Dannet, who were clearly vulnerable, it seems

⁷² Hunter, *Forgotten Hero*, pp. 49-50; Royden, *Pioneers and Perseverance*, p. 28.

⁷³ This is discussed in chapter 7, 'The Political Life of Dr Beilby Porteus'.

⁷⁴ This is discussed in chapters 3 and 4, 'James Cropper's Rise to Prominence' and '*The Impolicy of slavery*: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

likely that there is more than a kernel of truth in Currie's claim that abolitionists could openly argue their case in Liverpool and enjoy a fair degree of security and safety.

The Roscoe circle was a group of men, who as individuals occasionally enjoyed some degree of influence in local political affairs, but virtually none collectively.⁷⁵ However, it could be argued that any lack of effectiveness as campaigners for abolition can be ascribed to their own unwillingness, in the main, to make strong arguments and be seen in public to be doing so. Indeed, not all members were even necessarily abolitionists. The Anglican Rev. William Smyth was, of course, vulnerable to the same pressure from the Liverpool Corporation as were Dannet, Yates and Shepherd. Despite the more public stances adopted by fellow Anglican Revs John Yates and Henry Dannet not causing them too much trouble, even if Smyth was sympathetic to the cause, he may have felt that he was in no position openly to declare support for it.

The political climate in Liverpool gave the abolitionists what would seem to be a valid reason to exercise caution and restraint; their vulnerability to the powerful local supporters of slavery would appear to be obvious. Nevertheless, when Liverpool abolitionists, regardless of their social position, did make public their views under their own names, the consequences do not appear to have been too drastic. The lack of sanctions and censure directed at the city's women anti-slavery poets, Eliza Knipe and Mary Birkett (discussed below) is further evidence that potentially vulnerable Liverpudlians were relatively safe to express their abolitionist sympathies.

Whilst the Liverpool Ladies Society was not as prominent or numerous as for instance, their Birmingham counterpart, it was nevertheless an active, organised body, which was significantly engaged in the propaganda battle. Its members helped pack

⁷⁵ Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', pp. 198-207; Kitson, Introduction to R. Harris, in Kitson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, pp. 281-2.

and distribute parcels of East Indies sugar in the boycotting campaign. Further, in the 1830s it was instrumental in the distribution of significant numbers of anti-slavery pamphlets across the country.⁷⁶ The contribution made by Liverpoolian women to anti-slavery campaigns does to a great extent bear out Claire Midgley's statement that 'The formation of a network of ... ladies' anti-slavery associations ... marked the change from abolition as an individual woman's commitment, to anti-slavery as a collective feminine endeavour'.⁷⁷ Prior to the foundation of the Ladies' Association in Liverpool, activity was largely on an individual, ad hoc basis and for the most part took the form of publishing poems, which attacked slavery and the slave trade.

Two examples of this are Eliza Knipe and Mary Birkett. Illustrating the growing levels of mobility for many of the middle classes during the late eighteenth centuries and Liverpool's position as hub for much of this movement, both these women were only temporarily residents of the city. Knipe's chief contribution to this genre of literature was 'Atoboka and Omaza; an African Story'. This formed part of her second published collection of poetry, *Six Narrative Poems*, which was published for subscription in London in 1787. Though Knipe was born in London, part of her upbringing took place in Liverpool.⁷⁸ She was living in Liverpool at the time of *Six Narrative Poems*' publication and the fact that this collection was published in London is an indication that there was awareness in the capital of the potential for some level of support for the abolitionist cause in port at the centre of the trade. The sufferings of black people were commonly used as a device to engender sympathy for the abolitionist cause amongst the mostly female readership of this genre of literature,

⁷⁶ List of recipients of parcels and pamphlets (n.d. early 1830s), NMGM, D/CR/12/2; List of Anti-slavery Pamphlets Circulated by Liverpool Ladies Association (1830-31), NMGM, D/CR/12/39; Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 58.

⁷⁷ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 44.

⁷⁸ Richardson, introduction to Eliza Knipe, 'Atomboka and Omaza; an African Story', in Richardson, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, p. 63.

the target audience foreshadowing the future importance of women in the anti-slavery movement.⁷⁹ Published in the same year as Rushton's *West Indian Eclogues*, Knipe's Africans in 'Atoboka and Omaza; an African Story' are also depicted as noble and heroic and importantly as intellectually equal to Europeans.⁸⁰

Mary Birkett, a Quaker of Irish stock left Liverpool with her family at the age of ten. Although she only spent her early years in Liverpool, she is included here, because her family background suggests that there was a certain amount of largely unrecognised anti-slavery sentiment in the city, prior to the mobilisation of organised support. Her *Poem on the African Slave Trade*, published in 1792, when she was seventeen years old, is critical of England's involvement in the slave trade, contrasting that with Irish avoidance of the trade. She also argues for active resistance, echoing other women writers' calls for a boycott of West Indian sugar, referring to it as a 'blood-stain'd luxury'. She urges women to exert influence over their male relatives in order to persuade them to abstain from using sugar, and to act similarly themselves.

In common with Knipe and Rushton, and opposing contemporary orthodoxy, she portrays African people as the Europeans' intellectual and moral equals. She writes:

Let Sordid traders call it what they will,
Men must be men, possess with feelings still;
And littler boots a white or sable skin,
To prove a fair inhabitany within ...
... Man was his fav'rite work- he formed him free;
His favr'rite work whate'er his colour be:
And far more dark's the sinful soul within,
Than the poor harmless Negro's sable skin⁸¹

⁷⁹ D.B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca 1967), p. 388.

⁸⁰ Eliza Knipe, 'Atomboka and Omaza; An African Story', published in *Six Narrative Poems* (London, 1787); Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 33; M. Ferguson, *Subject to Others British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670 – 1834* (London, 1992), pp. 241, 362.

⁸¹ Mary Birkett, 'A Poem on the African Slave Trade Addressed to Her Own Sex' (Dublin, 1792); J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti Slavery, the Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the*

Maira Ferguson claims Birkett's *Poem on the African Slave Trade* recognises the 'oppression and rights of the colonised other, especially the rights to resist and the need for practical action'.⁸² As Cropper would do in the 1820s, Birkett ties together oppression of African and Irish people, laying the blame at the same English cause.

We need to beware of drawing concrete conclusions from these poets about the strength of anti-slavery sentiment in Liverpool, during the very early campaigns. However, their connections with the city, though perhaps tangential, do provide us with an illustration of broader sympathies with the cause. These two women spent parts of their formative years in the city and, either at first hand, or through their families would have been familiar with the slavery debate. It is unlikely that Birkett's or Knipe's families were entirely isolated in their views; indeed the evidence clearly suggests that there was a significant number of Liverpudlians who were opposed to the slave trade. Even given the city's economic attachment to slavery, they were beginning to make their voices heard.

It is significant that these calls for liberty and humanity, alongside Edward Rushton's *West Indian Eclogues*, come from marginalised members of society, either because of their sex, or poverty. These are people whose experiences of oppression came at first hand. Whilst their direct impact upon the anti-slavery campaigns was little more than peripheral, they are important for more than just illustrating local discontent with or opposition to the slave trade and slavery. Whilst the abolitionist movement was led by élite figures, such as Clarkson and Wilberforce and locally, members of the Roscoe Circle, the groundswell of support amongst the masses that the cause attracted was in large part the result of grass roots activity, which featured

Slave Trade, 1787 – 1807 (London, 1998), pp. 140–41; Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, pp.178, 180–82; Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 34–40.

⁸² Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, p. 181.

contributions to both sides of debate from common people, who were addressing people like themselves. As Tim Burke asserts, ‘Abolitionism was steered by aristocratic Tories ... and well connected Whigs ... but the contribution to its momentum by the works of “commoners” ... should not, perhaps, be underestimated’.⁸³

In the light of the evidence considered in this chapter, we can see that the support for abolitionism in Liverpool has been largely underestimated. A fairly significant level of support, or at least tolerance, for the anti-slavery cause may be discerned in the city at the time of the earliest stirrings of organised abolitionism. This can be seen even amongst Liverpool’s enfranchised élite, during the Parliamentary elections of 1806, when Roscoe was elected, pledging a commitment to gradual abolition of the slave trade, and standing against two incumbent, anti-abolitionist M.P.s, Bamber Gascoyne and Banastre Tarleton. However, this does not necessarily indicate a large groundswell of support for abolitionism. Roscoe’s victory was due at least in part to some ‘prodigious bribery of the electorate’ and also to controversy surrounding Tarleton’s desertion to the Whigs. Further, Roscoe hardly referred to slave trade or abolition throughout the campaign; indeed his backers included a number of freemen of the African Company. Nor should we conclude that the pro-slavery lobby did not still enjoy considerable popular support at this time. Roscoe voted for abolition in Parliament in 1807, but upon his return to Liverpool, he was attacked by a mob, including some unemployed seamen, who were keen to remind him of his election pledge to vote for abolition, only by gradual stages.⁸⁴

⁸³ T. Burke, “‘Humanity is Now the Pop’lar Cry’: Laboring Class Writers and the Liverpool Slave Trade, 1787-1789’, *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 42 (2001), p. 260.

⁸⁴ Sanderson, ‘The Structure of Politics in Liverpool’, pp. 85, 88; B.W. Higman, ‘The West India Interest in Parliament’, *Historical Studies* (Australia), 13 (1967), p. 9; D.A. Macnaughton, ‘Roscoe, William’, p. 737.

It was only when abolition became organised and formalised in Liverpool in the 1820s that the city was able to achieve any significant national prominence in the anti-slavery movement. By then abolitionists in Liverpool were to a great extent at the forefront of the national campaign, with Cropper perhaps the most active of them, and his family carrying out much of the leg work in the propaganda battle. Given Cropper's contributions and his growing influence within the ant-slavery movement and the Liverpool society's status and autonomy, there could certainly be no notion of a '*miniature* analogy' with the rest of the country, when discussing the activities of Liverpool's abolitionists during the second campaign.

Though the city's centrality in the later campaign cannot be questioned, there was virtually no organised activity in the city before the 1820s. However, it would also be erroneous to conclude that, even prior to 1807, there was minimal or ineffectual abolitionist activity *per se* in Liverpool. As stated above, abolitionists in the city operated in a manner specific to themselves and their locality. Despite the lack of a formal anti-slavery organisation, Liverpool abolitionists debated the issue of slavery openly in the city, provided valuable information to the national committee, and published forthright and sophisticated arguments against the trade. Individual Liverpool abolitionists, albeit often covertly and anonymously, though occasionally with significant risks to their own well being, made important practical and intellectual contributions to the early campaign against the slave trade, which paved the way for the city to assume a more central, leading role in the campaigns for emancipation up to 1834.

Chapter 3.

James Cropper's Rise to Prominence

There is little agreement amongst historians about James Cropper's activities and contribution to the abolitionist cause. He warrants little attention from some quarters and appears as something of a footnote, if at all, in some narratives. For instance, in his 2002 work, *The Mighty Experiment*, Seymour Drescher refers to Cropper's 'vision of a moral market engine of progress', but offers no examination of his activities. Cropper is also conspicuous by absence from recent populist histories of emancipation, such as Adam Hochschild's *Bury the Chains*.¹ Those who do recognise his contribution arrive at very different conclusions, concerning both his motivation and his effectiveness. Williams claims that Cropper's support did 'untold harm to the cause of humanitarianism' and argues that his 'dual position of humanitarian and economist forced him into inconsistencies'.² This is perhaps exemplified by Cropper's reaction to West Indian critics, who asked him if he intended to introduce Brazilian and Cuban slave-grown sugar to British markets, as well as East Indian free-grown sugar. He argued that should Brazil and Cuba end their involvement with slavery, their sugar would be admitted to the market at the same duty as British West Indian sugar - not exactly a free market position.³

Conversely, Williams' 'decline thesis' predecessor, Lowell Ragatz asserts that Cropper exemplified 'one of those occasional cases in which conduct is not primarily

¹ S. Drescher, *The Mighty experiment; Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford, 2002), p.116; A. Hochschild, *Bury the Chains; the British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (London, 2005).

² E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; reprint, London, 1964), p. 187.

³ James Cropper, *Relief for West Indian Distress, Shewing the Inefficiency of Protecting Duties on East Indies Sugar, and Pointing Out Other Modes of Certain Relief* (London, 1823).

influenced by self interest though they may accidentally collide'. Interestingly, despite his dismissal of Cropper's humanitarian credibility, Williams concurs with this summation.⁴ However we judge the relationship between Cropper's humanitarianism and commercial self interest, it is important to recognise that he was indeed a major local and national figure in the campaign for emancipation. Indeed, in the 1820s, the London Anti-Slavery Committee recognised the Liverpool Anti-Slavery Association, which was centred around Cropper, as a separate and equal body, with jurisdiction over the distribution of propaganda material across the North of England, Ireland and the United States of America.

When *Liverpool and Slavery* was published in 1884, it was 'inscribed to the memories' of William Roscoe, William Rathbone, Dr. Binns, Dr. Currie and James Cropper.⁵ Whilst Roscoe, Rathbone, Binns and Currie were all subscribers to the Society for Abolition in 1788 and were by Liverpoolian standards, at least, prominent activists in the campaign to end the trade in slaves, Cropper was not. His inclusion in this list would appear, therefore, to be a little incongruous. He would have only been fifteen years old in 1788, and though he seems to have come to prominence in the later campaign for emancipation, as evinced by his extensive national and international abolitionist links and also by James McQueen's attack on him in 1825, Cropper is not traditionally seen as an active participant in the campaign against the African trade.⁶ His name is not commonly

⁴ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, pp. 186 -8; L. J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833* (New York, 1928), pp. 435-6.

⁵ Frontispiece to Anonymous, *Liverpool and Slavery; An Historical Account of the Liverpool-African Slave Trade* (1884; reprint, Liverpool, 1984).

⁶ J. Civil, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels', Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, *Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Slavery and Women's Rights* (25-8 Oct 2001), pp. 2-3, available at <<http://www.yale.edu/glc/conference/civil>> (retrieved 4 April 2004). McQueen's attacks on Cropper are discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

found alongside those of the ‘Liverpool Saints’, though he was very briefly a partner in the Rathbone family firm from 1795 to 1799, and in common with the members of the Roscoe circle, interested in various areas of reform. Further, and also in common with most of the circle, Cropper was a religious Dissenter.⁷ Perhaps Cropper’s name is listed as recognition of his achievements in the campaigns of the 1820s and 30s, confirming that he had become the leading abolitionist in Liverpool, assuming in the later campaign a similar level of prominence to that previously enjoyed by Roscoe, Currie and Rathbone. However, his inclusion here, alongside known early activists, may indicate that he was also known locally for a significant contribution to the anti slave trade campaign.

Liverpool and Slavery does not provide any evidence in its somewhat scatological and omission-ridden narrative that Cropper was active in the earlier campaigns, of his well-documented activity in the later campaign for emancipation, or of his eventual stature in abolitionist circles. However, of the early abolitionists, only Rathbone Senior, Binns and Currie are discussed, and then in a scant and incomplete manner. Even the renowned Liverpool slave trader turned abolitionist, the Rev. John Newton, only warrants one small paragraph in the text.

The Cropper archive holds many clues to both Cropper’s activities and his motives for opposition to the slave trade. Further, his correspondence with other abolitionists and reformers in Britain, Ireland and America reveals some of their prejudices and motives, as well as his own. For example, William Wilberforce wrote to Cropper in 1822, warning against recruiting the ‘wrong sort’ of members to the Liverpool

⁷ K. Charlton, ‘James Cropper and Liverpool’s Contribution to the Anti-Slavery Movement’, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 123 (1971), p. 57.

Society; ‘persons who are obnoxious to public prejudice & who may be supposed likely to give a tincture to the proceedings’.⁸

Being addressed to Cropper, rather than William Roscoe or Isaac Hodges (respectively the President and Secretary of the Liverpool Society), this letter attests his importance to the national campaign for emancipation. Importantly, it is also evidence of a difference of opinion between Cropper and Wilberforce (which the latter attempts to defuse) over suitable approaches to abolitionism. Cropper had made his position known in a set of letters to Wilberforce, which he published in 1822.⁹ In these letters, he attempts to persuade the abolitionist’s parliamentary spokesman of the usefulness of his plan for growing sugar using free labour in the East Indies to the anti-slavery cause. In his letter to Cropper, Wilberforce claims that their positions were not as at variance as Cropper suggested, stating that he believes ‘on the whole that we should scarcely at all differ when each of us qualified his general principle by the qualification arriving out of particular circumstances’.¹⁰ This is perhaps an illustration that the new abolitionist leader in Liverpool favoured a more steadfast approach than his predecessors had done, which was of some concern to the more cautious Wilberforce, and of the general lack of homogeneity amongst abolitionists. Other than an opposition to the cruelty of the Caribbean slave system (not necessarily the institution of slavery itself), or before 1807 the trade in slaves, there was no single ideology that bound the campaigners. Cropper was certainly aware of the plurality of standpoints and values amongst his fellow abolitionists;

⁸ William Wilberforce, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 23 Oct 1822. NMGM, D/CR/4/3.

⁹ James Cropper, *Letters to William Wilberforce M. P., Recommending the Encouragement of the Cultivation of Sugar in Our Dominions in the East Indies, as the Natural and Certain Means of Effecting the Total and General Abolition of the Slave Trade* (Liverpool, 1822).

¹⁰ William Wilberforce, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 23 Oct 1822, NMGM, D/CR/4/3.

his two scrapbooks of anti-slavery paraphernalia contain cuttings and pamphlets illustrating this broad range of views.

Cropper's national influence is attested by his success in persuading the London Committee to adopt his plan to 'stimulate new anti-slavery feeling' and to consolidate existing support across the country. The proposal was for Thomas Clarkson to travel around the country, visiting areas which had not sent petitions to Parliament, whilst Cropper himself would visit existing anti-slavery societies, providing them with information and enlightening them regarding the importance to the campaign of free trade and East Indian sugar. Cropper argued that the expenses for Clarkson's travels ought to be met by the London Committee, but offered £500 of his own money to the Committee towards covering them. His own expenses, he would meet himself. In persuading the London Committee to adopt this proposal, Cropper also persuaded them of the positive economic impact of emancipation.¹¹

Cropper was an abolitionist along similar steadfast lines to Clarkson and had discussed this proposal with him, prior to presenting it to the committee. However, the proposal did not seem to damage the potentially fractious relations between Cropper and the much more moderate William Wilberforce, though it seems that Cropper had feared it might do. We can perhaps detect some of the potential for friction between Cropper and Wilberforce in an exchange of letters during October 1824. On the 26th, Matthew Babington, an abolitionist of Derby, wrote to Cropper. In this letter, he goes to great lengths to reassure Cropper about his standing with Wilberforce, stating that Wilberforce held him in high esteem. He enclosed a letter that Wilberforce had sent to him, two days

¹¹ D.B. Davis, 'James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement 1821-1823', *Journal of Negro History*, 45 (1981), pp. 154-73; D. Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery 1780-1860*, (London 1991), pp. 35, 48.

previously. In this missive, Wilberforce seems to be reassuring Babbington about his feelings towards Cropper and the closeness of their views regarding the direction the campaign should take. He writes ‘Good Cropper’s proposal ... makes me love better, a man I already esteemed and loved’. In the light of the diverse standpoints amongst abolitionists, we can perhaps see here an attempt on Wilberforce’s part at maintaining, or fostering unity. We may also suspect that he was attempting to deflect criticism of his cautious approach, and by professing enthusiastic support for a plan drawn up by Cropper and Clarkson, he was perhaps allying himself with the more steadfast wing of the anti-slavery movement.¹²

Cropper was a successful East Indies merchant, an advocate of free trade and the largest importer of free-grown East Indian sugar into Liverpool. His commercial activities drew accusations from his contemporaries, and from twentieth century writers, that his objection to slavery and slave-produced goods was based upon a need or desire to protect his own economic interests.¹³ While it may not be safe to dismiss the argument entirely, it seems that in this respect at least, he was not so cynical. Aware that his business interests would be likely to attract these accusations of protectionism, Cropper stated the case in reverse, underlining his adherence to the principles of free trade, and his opposition to slavery and the trade in slaves, claiming that he had no desire to increase his own fortune and that ‘the cultivation of sugar in our dominions [would be] the natural and certain means of effecting the total and general abolition of the slave trade’.¹⁴ Unlike other prominent abolitionists such as Wilberforce, Cropper appeared to be genuinely

¹² Matthew Babbington, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 28 Oct 1824 NMGM, D/CR/11/31; William Wilberforce, personal correspondence to Matthew Babbington, 26 Oct, 1824, NMGM, D/CR/11/30.

¹³ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, pp. 186-7.

¹⁴ Introduction to *Letters to William Wilberforce M. P.*, p. vii. See note 8 above.

concerned by poverty and oppression wherever they occurred and recognised these conditions' existence closer to home in England and Ireland.¹⁵

Whatever the driving force behind his abolitionist stance, Cropper's views on broader issues appear to show him at odds both with orthodoxy and with many other abolitionists. If we examine Cropper's attitude to poverty in Ireland, alongside his opposition to slavery, we see a complicated relationship with orthodox thinking. Cropper visited Ireland in 1824 with his daughter, Eliza, where he witnessed acute poverty, which he attributed to the British government's trade restrictions.¹⁶ He recognised poverty in England as well as Ireland as a problem that needed tackling, not for reasons of social control, but from a sense of Christian fellowship, philanthropy, compassion and what he perceived to be good economic sense: the liberating and wealth-creating benefits of free trade. Importantly, he saw the oppression of Irish peasants and West Indian slaves as parts of the same problem, and he believed that the solution to both issues was similarly tied together. Referring to what he considered the wasteful subsidies and bounties paid to West Indian planters and the liberating effects of free trade, Cropper argued:

But if we are to still to make such immense sacrifices for the colonies, we ought at least to receive in return an overflow of wealth and prosperity from them. But instead of this we shall find, that to the general prosperity of this country there are two grand exceptions – the West Indies and Ireland. The slavery of the West Indies, and the condition of a large part of the population of Ireland, form two dark stains on the otherwise bright and cheering picture.¹⁷

Cropper believed that with low wage expectations and seemingly inexhaustible reserves of peat for fuel, Ireland had great potential for manufacturing. The trade in East-

¹⁵ M.W. Kirby, 'Cropper, James in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography From the earliest Times to the year 2000*, 14 (Oxford 2004), pp. 406-7.

¹⁶ *The Waterford Chronicle*, 23 Nov and 27 Nov. 1824; *The Waterford Mirror*, 29 Nov 1824 NMGM, D/CR/13.

¹⁷ James Cropper, *Impolicy of Slavery* (Liverpool, 1822).

Indies sugar was unfairly hampered by (subsidised) slave-grown sugar's relative cheapness, and therefore, Cropper argued, the wage earners of the East Indies were unable to buy the cotton produce that the starving Irish would gladly make, if they were not prevented from doing so by unreasonable tariffs. Slave emancipation, coupled with fair trading conditions for Ireland, Cropper believed, were not merely humanitarian issues, but made sound commercial policy.¹⁸ Pertinently, Cropper makes no mention of the textile goods traditionally produced in the East, which, before the Lancashire cotton industry established itself, had entered Britain in large quantities, a significant proportion of which was destined specifically for the Africa trade. His intended audience was interested in the well being of British industrial manufacturers, but not that of their Indian counterparts.

Commerce operated best, Cropper believed, under *natural* market forces and he praised the success of the British economy with its 'unrestrained and free' workforce as proof of this, despite the poverty that he witnessed in Liverpool and across Lancashire.¹⁹ He also believed that free trade was the answer to poverty and oppression and that it would reveal God's plan.²⁰ His awareness of the problems of poverty nearer to home still, in Lancashire, is evinced by his philanthropic activities. He set up a ragged school for boys and a home for 'fallen girls' in Liverpool. In 1810, when he inherited his father's farm at Fearnhead, between Warrington and Ormskirk, Cropper offered food and employment to anyone prepared to work for him, and many Irish people accepted his

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; F.A. Coneybeare, *Dingle Bank, The Home of the Croppers* (Cambridge 1925), pp. 16-17; Cropper's plan which allies ending West Indian slavery with alleviating poverty in Ireland is discussed in chapter 4, 'The Impolicy of Slavery: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

¹⁹ James Cropper, 'Slave Labour and Free Labour' The substance of his address on Wednesday, November, 22 'at a respectable meeting', King's Head, Derby, 1825. RIO7337.6.12; NMGM, D/CR/13.

²⁰ R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London, 1988), p. 439.

offer. In 1834 he founded an agricultural school at the farm and built a new house for himself there, in order that he might personally supervise its operation. He deliberately scheduled the school's opening to coincide with the emancipation of the West Indian slaves.²¹ Despite these endeavours, it appears that Cropper failed to see that the poverty he was combating in England was in large part the direct effect of the free market, with its 'unrestrained and free' workers, and 'unshackled' commerce.

As stated previously, Cropper had extensive regional, national and international connections. His political and commercial network included contacts across Lancashire and the country at large, as well as in Ireland and North America and he met monthly with fellow Quakers from across the region.²² He did not hide his abolitionist light under a bushel. His family crockery was decorated with images and mottoes based upon Josiah Wedgwood's 1787 'Am I not a man and a brother' motif.²³ He was also involved in organising boycotts of slave-grown produce, making up parcels of East-Indies sugar and coffee and distributing them amongst Members of Parliament and other potentially influential sympathisers.²⁴ Cropper's activities between 1822 and 1838 do mark him out as a prominent agitator for reform and abolition, and there is a strong argument that during this period he did take over the mantle of Liverpool's leading abolitionist figure. Given Cropper's background and local standing, it seems likely that he would have an

²¹ Coneybeare, *Dingle Bank*, p. 8; Kirby, 'Cropper, James', p. 407; Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 112.

²² Edward Cropper, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 26 Nov 1824 NMGM, D/CR/10/43; Expenses and journey distances of South Lancashire Quakers meeting monthly in Hardshaw NMGM, D/CR/11/3; List of Cropper's correspondents in Britain, Ireland and the USA NMGM, D/CR/12/38. The importance of Warrington as a centre for religious Dissent and reformist activity is discussed in chapter 6, 'The Context for Abolitionism in Liverpool's and Manchester's shared Hinterland'.

²³ Introduction to the Cropper Archive (Merseyside Maritime Museum); Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 187.

²⁴ Coneybeare, *Dingle Bank*, pp. 25, 56-7.

involvement, at some level, in the campaign against the slave trade prior to 1806. The evidence is perhaps a little thin, but seems to suggest this.

Cropper was indeed at least aware of the main activists in the campaign to end the trade in slaves and was known by them to sympathise with their cause. In March 1823, Clarkson wrote to Cropper counselling against prevarication and caution. This letter, which contrasts neatly with that that Wilberforce sent to Cropper five months previously, urges Cropper to prompt action.²⁵ Clarkson compares the vitality of the early campaign with the more hesitant approach adopted by the new Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. He is either informing or reminding Cropper of the success of the earlier campaign and how it was achieved.²⁶ A shared connection with the Rathbones suggests that Clarkson was aware of Cropper, and this letter suggests that he had confidence in him directing more effective organised and overt abolitionist activity in Liverpool than had the cautious Roscoe and Currie in the campaign up to 1806.

A letter written to Thomas Clarkson by the French General Duc de Lafayette, in 1798, which Cropper, had in his possession, hints at the proximity of Clarkson's and Cropper's views. Though there is no indication within the letter that it was addressed to Clarkson, it is labelled (twice) in ink on its reverse, 'Lafayette's letter to Tho^s Clarkson'. The letter was clearly of some importance to Cropper, but offers no clue why.

Clarkson, though an enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution, had been unimpressed with *Les Amis des Noirs*, when he visited France in 1789. He found them to be badly organised, inactive and poorly supported. Disillusioned with the French society's ineffectiveness, he had undertaken to lobby members of the French Assembly

²⁵ See note 7 above.

²⁶ Thomas Clarkson, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 25 March 1823; NMGM/D/CR/11/30.

himself, but met with no success. He left France at the end of the year, openly frustrated and disappointed. The following year the French government announced that not only would it not interfere with the slave trade, but would prohibit agitation against it.²⁷

Lafayette was a plantation and slave owner in the Caribbean, but had considerable sympathy with moderate abolitionists, being a member of *Les Amis des Noirs*. This letter emphasises Lafayette's and *Les Amis*' preference for a moderate and gradualist approach to abolitionism, a view shared by many British abolitionists. It illustrates his optimistic perceptions of the French Revolution being a positive step towards achieving abolition, which was also a view shared by some early abolitionists in Britain, although the Revolutionary French government would disappoint them (as outlined above). Outlining previous differences with Clarkson and asserting the correctness of his own stance, though writing in a conciliatory tone, Lafayette reaffirms his confidence in the French Doctrine of Liberty to bring about a 'speedy destruction of the slave trade'. He responds to Clarkson's disappointment with both *Les Amis des Noirs* and the French government, by referring to the British Parliament as 'too backward' to bring about any measures against the trade. Lafayette used the revolution in St. Domingue to illustrate how a 'hurried' approach had led to disaster and cites his own plantation in Cayenne, 'where gradual emancipation had for some years been attempted', as a positive illustration of a more moderate approach. Nevertheless, despite his tendency to moderation, Lafayette recognises the then present need for urgent action.²⁸

²⁷ J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery, The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (London, 1998), pp. 54-7; D.B. Davis *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770 – 1823* (Ithaca 1975), pp. 95-100.

²⁸ Duc de Lafayette, personal correspondence to Thomas Clarkson, 27 Jan 1798, NMGM, D/CR/4/1.

The content of the letter indicates that Lafayette's position had in 1798 by necessity shifted away from gradualism and closer to Clarkson's (and Cropper's) more steadfast view, while the tone suggests that he hoped and expected Clarkson largely to share his own sentiments. We have no way of knowing when or why Cropper came to possess this letter, but its presence in the Cropper archive is intriguing.

Cropper's possession of this letter clearly shows his awareness of the debate about slavery and the slave trade, during the campaign for abolition of the trade up to 1807. Further, it would be unlikely for a seemingly unremarkable piece of personal correspondence, which contains little, if anything, of serious political contention to be kept intact from 1788 until 1822 (as the campaign for emancipation began to gather momentum), before finding its way, either directly from Clarkson or via a third party into Cropper's possession. Cropper's involvement in abolitionism cannot, however, be traced to twenty-five years earlier than previously acknowledged on the back of this correspondence alone. Clarkson's letter to Cropper of 1823, either reminding or informing Cropper of the earlier campaign is similarly inconclusive.

It seems unlikely that Cropper could have risen to the position that he did within the Liverpool abolitionist ranks, when other members of the Roscoe circle (including Roscoe himself) were still active, without some involvement in the earlier campaign. When the trade in slaves was abolished in 1807, Cropper would have been approaching his thirty-fourth birthday. The son and heir of a prosperous Lancashire farmer and an increasingly successful merchant in Liverpool in his own right, James Cropper's affluence would have made him part of the city's élite. He was closely connected to senior members of the Roscoe circle and other abolitionists active in the campaign and

would have known most of the main local protagonists in the debate, if not personally, then certainly by repute.

Cropper's association with members of the Roscoe circle can be traced back to 1790, when he was apprenticed to William Rathbone's shipping company, *Rathbone and Benson*. In 1795, aged twenty-two, he became a partner in the firm.²⁹ The company had been trading since the 1740s in Liverpool, specialising in importing West Indian and American commodities, before establishing itself as a shipping agency in the 1780s. Although the importation of slave-grown cotton had previously been an important and lucrative business activity for the company, by the time William Rathbone IV took over the firm on his father's death in 1789, it was conducting business in 'staunch opposition to the slave trade', which supports the notion that life for abolitionists in Liverpool was not necessarily too fraught.³⁰

Cropper's partnership in the Rathbones' family business was to last less than a year, as Robert Benson's illness brought about the dissolution of the partnership in 1796. Rathbone formed a new partnership, *Rathbone, Hughes and Duncan*, in September of that year which continued to trade as commission merchants. On Rathbone's death in 1809, his sons formed a new partnership, *William and Richard Rathbone*. Cropper was still closely connected to the family at this time, and was involved with the legal dissolution of the *Rathbone Hughes and Duncan* partnership.³¹ In 1799, Cropper renewed, or at least formalised his links with the Bensons, when with Robert Benson's son Thomas

²⁹ Apprenticeship Indenture of James Cropper to William Rathbone and Robert Benson, 1 Aug 1790, NMGM, D/CR/2/1. Robert Benson was William Rathbone IV's brother-in-law, who joined the Rathbone family firm as a partner in 1790.

³⁰ Introduction to *The Rathbone Papers*; A. Gordon and M.W. Kirby, 'Rathbone, William' in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 46, p. 103.

³¹ Articles of dissolution of partnership: Rathbone, Benson and Cropper, Merchants, 13 Oct 1795, 22 Mar 1800 NMGM, D/CR/2/3; *The Rathbone Papers* RP XXIII.1.27.

he founded the merchant company, which would earn him his fortune, *Cropper and Benson*.³²

His commercial involvement with the Rathbones and Bensons also brought Cropper into contact with the Hodgson family. Like Cropper, the Hodgsons had strong commercial links across the region, being sons of Thomas Hodgson, a merchant and manufacturer who had made his fortune in the Africa trade before retiring and investing his money in cotton mills in Lancashire. He then retired from manufacturing, following heavy losses in 1817.³³ Isaac Hodgson became the first secretary of the Liverpool Society, and Cropper had commercial connections with David Hodgson.³⁴ In 1823, *The Kaleidoscope* magazine published an open letter from Adam Hodgson to the political economist Jean-Baptiste Say, across two issues, with a supportive commentary in 'The Philanthropist' Column. In this letter Hodgson outlines the economic benefits of abolishing slavery, referring to Adam Smith's work and the testimonies of abolitionist sympathisers with first hand knowledge of the Caribbean colonies.³⁵ This line of argument was very close to that which Cropper followed in his public correspondence of the same year.³⁶ It seems that tying projected economic benefits of free labour to the increasingly influential ideology of *laissez-faire* was a tactic Liverpool abolitionists widely employed to attract influential supporters from the new industrial middle class.

³² Minutes of agreement between James Cropper and Thomas Benson to trade as 'Cropper and Benson' 1 Sep 1799 NMGM, D/CR/2/2; Articles of dissolution of partnership: Rathbone, Benson and Cropper NMGM, D/CR/2/3.

³³ M.B. Rose *The Greys of Styal* (London, 1978), p. 10. This is discussed in chapter 6, 'The Context for Abolitionism in Liverpool's and Manchester's Shared Hinterland'.

³⁴ *Declaration of the Objects of The Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* NMGM, D/CR/11/15; David Hodgson, correspondence to James Cropper, printed dissolution circular, 31 Jan 1838 NMGM, D/CR/2/6.

³⁵ A. Hodgson, correspondence to Jean Baptiste Say (1823); *The Kaleidoscope* (1823), NMGM, DX 428/1.

³⁶ This is discussed in chapter 4 'The Impolicy of Slavery'; James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

Although it would be another ten years before the London Committee would officially adopt this line of argument, from the evidence examined within this thesis, it may be fair to conclude that they met with some success in attracting support to the cause. The perceived economic benefits of free trade and free labour and the protection of self interest amongst adherents to *laissez-faire* economic thinking provide motivation for much abolitionist activity in the North West of England, beyond reasons of a purely humanitarian or religious nature.

Cropper's public opposition to almost all forms of poverty and oppression chimed with William Rathbone IV's fairly radical views. Despite their inevitable associations with the pro-slavery lobby in Liverpool, it seems that the Rathbones' public commitment to abolition was considerably less hesitant than that of either Currie or Roscoe. Thomas Clarkson spoke highly of William Rathbone III, commending him for his refusal to supply slave ships. William Rathbone IV was known to be politically progressive, supporting free trade and universal suffrage, and was involved in most major political disputes in Liverpool. On Irish matters too, their views seemed largely to coincide. Indeed, it was because of his publication of *Narrative of Events in Ireland Among the Quakers* against religious intolerance within the organisation, that William Rathbone IV left the Society of Friends.³⁷

Although Cropper was a committed and prominent opponent of slavery in the British colonies, his position appeared, initially at least, a little confused on the issue of slavery in mainland America. He had begun his merchant career trading in American cotton and pro-slavery advocates did not miss the chance to accuse him of hypocrisy. As discussed elsewhere within this study, Cropper's commercial and religious model for

³⁷ This is discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

emancipation and world prosperity apparently did not necessarily include cotton plantation owners in the southern states of America freeing their slaves. Nevertheless, his commercial argument regarding the efficiency of slave labour applied to American plantations in the same way as it did to those in the British Caribbean. He makes this clear in *Impolicy of Slavery*, asserting 'In the United States, land of a worse quality, and more unfavourably situated, if cultivated by free men, is worth more than double the price of better land, in a better situation, in the same district, when that land is cultivated by slaves'.³⁸ Further, his transatlantic abolitionist connections were numerous and throughout the 1820s, Cropper was in regular contact with American abolitionists, dispatching considerable quantities of anti-slavery propaganda, as well importing similar American material.³⁹

From as early as 1819, Cropper was gathering information about American slavery, and he placed orders for several American abolitionist publications in the 1820s. He was also sending packages of pamphlets across the Atlantic in large quantities, many of which he had written himself, throughout the 1820s and early 1830s. The recipients of this material in 1827-8 included three American Quaker abolitionists: New York publisher, Isaac Collins, Thomas Evans, a druggist from Philadelphia and Thomas Pym Cope, who ran a packet service between Liverpool and Philadelphia. Cropper also sent propaganda material to the editors of leading American antislavery periodicals. His 1827-8 list of correspondents includes Benjamin Lundy, John Brown Russworm and Enoch Lewis. Lundy edited *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, which had published an

³⁸ James Cropper, *Impolicy of Slavery*.

³⁹ List of James Cropper's orders for American newspapers, NMGM, D/CR/12/43; List of James Cropper's American correspondents (c. 1829-31) NMGM, D/CR/12/30; List of James Cropper's American correspondents (c. 1833), NMGM, D/CR/12/47.

anonymous letter, almost certainly written by Cropper in 1827. Russworm's *Freedom Journal* was published in New York and he was an early contact of Cropper's in the city's free black community. Lewis edited *The African Observer* and was the brother of Evan Lewis, a correspondent of Thomas Clarkson.⁴⁰

Between 1829 and 1831, Cropper updated and expanded his list of American correspondents, adding eight new contacts. Russworm had emigrated to Liberia in 1829 and Peter Williams, an Episcopalian bishop and future leader of the American Antislavery Society replaced him as Cropper's contact amongst New York's free black community. New Quaker contacts on the list included Thomas Ellicot, a banker from Baltimore whose family had led the Maryland Abolition Society in the 1790s; Joseph Parker, who was prominent in the Pennsylvania Abolition Society; Arnold Buffum, who would become agent for the New England Abolition Society; and Samuel Parsons, a New York radical. Cropper's list was updated again in 1833, with four new names appearing. Two of these were prominent militant black activists, Julius Morel from Philadelphia and Henry Sipkins from New York. The other two were both clergymen; James Patterson from Philadelphia and Charles Wheeler Dennison, who was secretary of the New York City Antislavery Society. A further transatlantic contact was James McCune Smith, a militant black intellectual, who had probably first received material from Cropper, when he was a medical student and emancipation activist in Glasgow.⁴¹

⁴⁰ List of James Cropper's orders for American newspapers (n.d.), NMGM, D/CR/12/30; List of anti-slavery pamphlets at R. Dickinson's 16 Feb 1828, NMGM, D/CR/12/35; List of anti-slavery pamphlets sent to R. Newton (n.d. early 1820s), NMGM, D/CR/12/36; List of anti-slavery pamphlets sent to Benjamin Lundy (1827) NMGM, D/CR/12/49; List of books at Slater Street Lending Library, 16 Feb 1829, NMGM, D/CR/12/51; Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels', pp 8-10.

⁴¹ List of recipients of parcels of pamphlets (n.d. early 1830s), NMGM, D/CR/12/2; List of James Cropper's American correspondents (c. 1829-31), NMGM, D/CR/12/43; List of James Cropper's American

Although he certainly had well established and strong transatlantic abolitionist links and had publicly argued that American plantations operated more profitably using free labour, it was not until the 1830s that Cropper began publicly to criticise the cruelty of slavery in the United States in the same way as he did British colonial slavery. In 1832 he published an open letter to Thomas Clarkson, whom he terms his 'Dear Friend', in which he disavows any connection with or support for the American Colonization Society, which sought to send free black people in America back to Africa. In this letter, Cropper not only criticises the treatment of slaves on the plantations, but also bemoans the vulnerability and lowly status of free black people in the United States. The following year, Cropper emphasised this position further, publishing a pamphlet, which argued for the American Colonization Society to be disbanded and fundamentally linked this to the abolition of American Slavery.⁴²

It is possible that Cropper was guilty of considerable disingenuity when he appeared to blur his position on American slavery in the 1820s, allowing his British industrialist and merchant audience to see his model's economic benefits in the best possible light as far as their interests were concerned, promising increased prosperity, without threatening to disrupt the supply of American slave-grown cotton. Given the nature of his links with abolitionists in America and his almost covert plans to undermine the profitability of American plantations, it is also possible that on the eve of emancipation for slaves in the British Caribbean, he could sense victory. Moreover, as

correspondents (c. 1833) NMGM, D/CR/12/47; Cavin, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels', pp. 10-12.

⁴² James Cropper, *Impolicy of Slavery*; James Cropper, open letter to Thomas Clarkson 2 Oct 1832 NMGM, D/CR/11/36; James Cropper, *The Extinction of the American Colonization Society. The First Step to the Abolition of American Slavery* (no place of publication, 1833), NMGM, D/CR/11/38. Cropper's public position in the 1820s is discussed in chapter 4, 'The Impolicy of Slavery, James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

one of the abolitionist movement's leaders, he felt able and perhaps compelled to criticise the institution of slavery in America openly, and make a more humanitarian, less self-contradictory set of arguments.⁴³

When considering the economic arguments that Cropper made, we can perhaps detect some validity in the ideas forwarded by Roger Anstey, that such appeals to national prosperity masked a humanitarian concern.⁴⁴ However, it is probably safer to conclude that humanitarianism was but one strand of a broad web of motivating forces that drove individual abolitionists, such as Cropper. His public fudging of the issue of slaves in the United States, whilst almost covertly establishing and fostering links with prominent American abolitionists, would seem to fit in with Anstey's interpretation: that his commercial argument masked the humanitarian concern, which was the real motivation for his abolitionist sympathies. However, when we consider Cropper's concurrent abolitionist and merchant activities on both sides of the Atlantic, alongside the amount and content of the propaganda he produced and distributed, it is clear that his economic interests and the ideology he perceived to promote and protect them were equally important concerns for him. To argue otherwise would appear to suggest that abolitionists in particular and the British public in general had the capacity only to respond to the question of slavery, or indeed other issues, in one-dimensional ways. It seems unlikely, to say the least, that intelligent and articulate political activists, with diverse, overlapping interests and positions were only able to operate in such a limited fashion.

⁴³ Cropper's public position in the 1820s is discussed in chapter 4, '*The Impolicy of Slavery*, James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'.

⁴⁴ D. B. Davis, Introduction to R. Anstey, 'Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics, 1829-1833', *Slavery and Abolition*, 2 (1982), p. 210.

As late as 1833, with the campaign for emancipation all but won, Cropper wrote several pamphlets attacking the monopoly and bounties enjoyed by the West Indian Planters and their greed for claiming compensation for freeing their slaves. In these pamphlets, Cropper continued to attack the institution of slavery and the greed and inefficiency of the plantocracy, along the familiar lines making appeals to both humanitarian and commercial interests and paying particular attention to the issue of free trade. In turns he castigates the planters for their greed in wishing to retain their slaves and maintain their favoured trading position, and admonishes them for their lack of commercial good sense for exactly the same reasons.⁴⁵

Vindication of a Loan at first appears to be a rather conciliatory pamphlet, but is really an attack on the planters' request for £20 million compensation for their losses, should they free their slaves. Cropper recognises that some payment would have to be made to them, but argues that the compensation should be loaned to the planters, rather than given to them as a gratuity. This would clearly fit more easily with free-trade thinking and would avoid effectively rewarding the planters for their involvement with slavery. Returning to a familiar theme, Cropper argues that the security of this loan would be guaranteed by the improved productivity of the plantations once they employed free labour and applied sensible policies of crop rotation and rearing cattle instead of applying to the legislature for cash payments or bounties to help them deal with problems such as soil exhaustion. Here, Cropper seems to suggest that the inefficiency of slave labour is

⁴⁵ James Cropper, *A Vindication of A Loan Of £15,000,000 To The West India Planters, Shewing That it May Not Only Be Lent With Perfect Safety, But With Immense Advantage Both to the West Indians and to The People of England* (London, 1833); James Cropper, *The Interests of the Country, and the Prosperity of the West Indian Planters, Mutually Assured By the Immediate Abolition of Slavery* (London, 1833); James Cropper, *Another Bonus to the Planters: or The Advantage Shown of an Equitable Purchase of the Monopoly and Bounty on West India Sugar* (London, 1833).

but one example of poor commercial practice on the part of the plantocracy; the type of inefficiency, he argues, that only free trade could remedy. Further, Cropper displays his lack of trust in the planters and dissatisfaction with the proposals to hold the slaves as indentured apprentices. He argues that the money should only be paid after the slaves' immediate emancipation, not upon the conversion of their labour regime to apprenticeship.⁴⁶

Cropper appeals to the concerns and sensibilities of the industrial middle class, praising the manufacturers' financial independence, comparing this to the planters' reliance on subsidies and bounties, asking:

What would British manufacturers, who mare daily making improvements in their manufactures, say to such a proposition as ... [compensation]? Would they think of asking for a compensation for old and exploded machinery when they are about to substitute it with better?⁴⁷

The conclusion to this tract continues in its *faux* conciliatory style, reassuring the planters about their future prosperity and inviting them to join in the celebration of the abolitionists' victory:

I hope the country will support a loan to the West Indians, by which I believe there is no danger of any loss whatever; and, further, that they will cordially sanction its being for so liberal an amount, as will enable the West Indians to profit by the change, and to participate in, the general rejoicings of the country on the accomplishment of this highly advantageous and glorious object.⁴⁸

Whilst it easy to detect the somewhat gloating tone of this publication, its effective tying together of humanitarian and commercial interests does illustrate the sophistication that Cropper employed in framing his argument. At this stage of the

⁴⁶ James Cropper, *A Vindication of a Loan*, pp. 2-16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

campaign, he was a well-practiced propagandist, had achieved a high level of national prominence and was speaking to an audience whose political influence could now potentially match their economic strength.

In *Another Bonus to the Planters*, Cropper visits the familiar ground of free trade, planters' commercial ineptitude and greed, and the fine example set by the Mancunian manufacturers. The pamphlet was published in the form of a letter to Manchester Member of Parliament, Mark Philips. Philips had suggested a scheme which would see the national government purchase 'from the West Indians any supposed claim they may have to a monopoly and bounty, so highly expensive and injurious to the country'. This pamphlet reveals Cropper's recognition of the increasing importance of Manchester and his focusing arguments in areas, which reflected Mancunian merchants and manufacturers' interests and praising their Member of Parliament. He addresses Philips as 'Esteemed Friend', and refers to him as 'the representative of the great metropolis of the commerce of the world'.⁴⁹

The pamphlet begins with a familiar attack on the planters' greed and poor business sense and once again outlines his reasons for loaning the planters £15 million. Cropper claims that this loan and the purchase of the monopoly would benefit not only the country at large, but the planters themselves, who were 'deeply involved in debt, and paying a high rate of interest. He argues:

Such are the vast advantages of the loan of £15,000,000 to the planters, that even if they repaid it at the end of 20 years, they would, if the money was lent 10 per cent. cheaper than they are now paying, have an advantage of £30,000,000 sterling. If they pay no interest it would make £40,000,000; hence they might well afford to give up a monopoly which costs the country so much, and affords so little profit to them.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*. pp. 8-9.

Cropper recognises that the economic questions might be a little complex and that his readership could find his reasoning difficult to follow, as indeed had proved the case thus far. In order to persuade this section of the public, he pleads for support from Lord Althorpe, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He praises Althorpe's knowledge and ability and he appeals to him to back the proposals publicly, heaping further praise on to Philips as he does so. His appeals to the government had clearly changed tack at this point. He was, after all, appealing now to men, who for the most part shared his free-trade ideals and who were about to free the Caribbean slaves. He enthuses:

Never was there a Chancellor of the Exchequer so able to convince the country, that an apparent tax of 3s. per cwt. On sugar, if accompanied by the abolition of the Bounty of 8s. per cwt., would, instead of advancing the price, reduce it 5s. per cwt. : and instead of reducing the consumption, would increase it. I have reason to know that Lord Althorpe understands the subject, and if he will only tell the country that this would be the effect of such a tax accompanied by such an arrangement, - whether the people understand the question themselves or not, every individual knows what he asserts is the candid, honest truth, and will believe it. And with respect to its effects on the commerce of the country what better support can he have than that of the representative for Manchester?⁵¹

We can perhaps see a little justification for the criticism of Cropper's economic and humanitarian position outlined above. In 1823, Cropper had answered West Indian critics of his plans, by asserting that sugar from Brazil and Cuba should be admitted, so long as they ended their use of slave labour and involvement in the slave trade.⁵² In *Another Bonus to the Planters*, he follows a familiar line, arguing that the proposed uniformly taxed market for sugar should only be open to free-grown sugar, which, though it did away with the West Indian monopoly, was by no means an entirely free market.⁵³ It

⁵¹ Cropper, *Another Bonus to the Planters*, pp. 10-11.

⁵² See note 2 above.

⁵³ Cropper, *Another Bonus to the Planters*, pp. 9-10; Cropper, *The Interests of the Country, and the Prosperity of the West Indian Planters*, pp. 10-11.

appears that Cropper had anticipated the possibility that his proposals for free trade, free labour conditions, which would ‘naturally’ lead to increased prosperity, might attract criticism for inconsistency in this instance. He argues once again that free labour was more productive than slave labour and that countries, which persisted in using slave labour for producing sugar would find themselves frozen out of the market and be forced to end their involvement with slavery. In a further appeal to the economic and patriotic sensibilities of his readers, he criticises the lack of success of the British and American efforts to police the seas, maintaining the ban on slave trading, for which his readers’ taxes were in part paying:

It might be urged against the entire freedom of the sugar trade, that it will renew the slave trade of the Brazils, and increase that of Cuba. But the sugars of those countries which still carry on the slave trade, might be excluded from the British market. And if the sugar trade is made perfectly free, it will soon certainly and effectually destroy the slave trade, and save all the expensive and hitherto ineffectual arrangement, made to effect that object.⁵⁴

Joshua Civin, who makes much of Cropper’s transatlantic connections in commercial and anti-slavery activities, argues that he achieved a position whereby he could exert considerable influence only by enlisting the help of the female members of his family.⁵⁵ Whilst this view perhaps denies any agency on the part of Cropper’s daughter, wife, daughters in law and indeed his sons, it does illustrate the increasingly important contribution that women made to the anti-slavery cause. This was something that Cropper himself recognised and his contacts with prominent women in the abolitionist cause such as Elizabeth Heyrick and Hannah More provide evidence of this recognition. Personal correspondence between the various members of the Cropper

⁵⁴ James Cropper, *Another Bonus to the Planters*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Civin, ‘The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels’, p. 16.

family attest to importance to them all of the anti-slavery cause, along with religious duties, relief of the Irish poor and the state of the family business.⁵⁶

Cropper's relationships with women abolitionists provide evidence of his overlapping commercial and abolitionist activity and his prominence in both fields in the North West of England and further afield during the 1830s. In 1830, keen to take advantage of the region's improving transport infrastructure and recognising the growing importance of Manchester as a manufacturing centre, Cropper invested money in the projected rail link between Liverpool and Manchester. He also invested money on behalf of the abolitionist author Elizabeth Heyrick. Whether this was in return for her antislavery pamphleteering efforts, as Civin suggests may be the case, is a moot point, but it is a strong indication of their close ties and the closeness to Cropper of religious commercial and abolitionist interests.⁵⁷ This is further emphasised in a letter of 1831 in which Cropper reminds his family of their religious duties and encourages them to enlist support for the abolitionist cause specifically from bankers and brokers.⁵⁸

These relationships also further underline his centrality and that of women activists to the national propaganda campaign, in addition to illustrating the Cropper family's significant involvement in supporting the anti-slavery cause as well as his individual campaigning activity. The involvement of the female members of Cropper's family in the Liverpool Ladies Anti Slavery Society provides yet more evidence to

⁵⁶ John and Anne Cropper, personal correspondence to Eliza Cropper 21 Nov 1824, NMGM, D/CR/10/42; Edward Cropper, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 26 Nov 1824, NMGM, D/CR/10/43; James Cropper, personal correspondence to John, Edward and Eliza Cropper, 27 Jan 1831, NMGM, D/CR/10/43; Eliza Cropper, personal correspondence to Thomas Cropper, 13 July 1812, NMGM, D/CR/11/8.

⁵⁷ James Cropper, personal correspondence to Elizabeth Heyrick, 28 Jan 1830 NMGM, D/CR/12/31; Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels', p. 16.

⁵⁸ James Cropper, personal correspondence to John, Edward and Eliza Cropper, 9 Aug 1831, NMGM, D/CR/10/58.

underline the extent of his links, as well as the high level of anti-slavery activity undertaken by women on a national and regional scale.⁵⁹

It is important to recognise the activities of the many women's anti-slavery organisations. It was the organised female abolitionists, who, in addition to producing such material, were largely responsible for packaging and distributing propaganda aimed at dissuading the use of West Indian sugar.⁶⁰ Despite opposition, notably from Wilberforce, women's organised anti-slavery gathered momentum through the 1820s and, as Wilberforce's influence began to falter, the Anti-Slavery Society's approval of and enthusiasm for women's associations increased.⁶¹ In 1828, *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* asserted that they were an important 'means of awakening and extending public interest'.⁶² His close links with the Liverpool Ladies' Anti-slavery Association indicate that Cropper was certainly aware of their importance to the campaign, as was Zachary Macaulay, who wrote to Cropper in 1828, stating that these associations 'seem to form now one main stay of our hopes'.⁶³ When we further consider that much of the contribution to the cause made by these women was by carrying out activities that fitted neatly with Cropper's own strategies, then we must see Cropper as a considerably influential figure in the national anti-slavery movement.

⁵⁹ Anne and John Cropper, personal correspondence to Eliza Cropper, 21 Nov 1824, NMGM, D/CR/10/42; List of recipients of parcels and pamphlets (n.d. early 1830s), NMGM, D/CR/12/2; List of anti-slavery pamphlets at R. Dickson's 16 Feb 1828 NMGM, D/CR/12/35; List of anti-slavery pamphlets sent to R. Newton (n.d. early 1820s) D/CR/12/36; List of anti-slavery pamphlets circulated by Liverpool Ladies Association 1830-31, NMGM, D/CR/12/39.

⁶⁰ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 49, 57, 61-3; L. Colley, *Britons; Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London, 1992), p.292.

⁶¹ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 47-51.

⁶² *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, (May, 1828), p. 213.

⁶³ Zachary Macaulay, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 16 Feb 1828, cited In Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, p. 49.

Cropper's influence and prominence within the abolitionist movement came as the campaign for emancipation gathered momentum in the 1820s. We can see that he was closely connected to leading abolitionists in Liverpool during the campaign against the slave trade, but this does not necessarily indicate a high level of activity or local prominence. His steadfast approach to abolitionism attracted Thomas Clarkson's approval as much as it concerned William Wilberforce. In the campaign against the slave trade, intelligence passed to the London Committee notwithstanding, formal, organised activity was virtually non-existent in Liverpool. Although Edward Rushton published some radical material and claimed friends and enemies in high places, local leadership was largely in the hands of the somewhat reticent Roscoe and Currie. It was with these men that Wilberforce largely corresponded, whilst Clarkson, whose apparent impetuosity and enthusiasm was the cause of some anguish to his more cautious colleagues, sought out and favoured the more outspoken and forthright abolitionists in the city.⁶⁴ As Wilberforce's influence waned, the thrust of abolitionist arguments began to reflect the views of the more steadfast activists. This was accompanied by a swing in political power towards the industrial middle class. Cropper's position became more central and he was able to take advantage of this, as the power brokers were now the order of people, whom he had hoped to persuade with his free-trade argument against slavery.

In the light of the above, and his public correspondence on the connected issues of free trade, free labour and the role of fairly taxed East Indian sugar in bringing both about (discussed in the following chapter), it would be unreasonable to disagree too strongly

⁶⁴ M. Royden, *Pioneers and Perseverance; A History of the Royal School for the Blind, Liverpool, 1791-1991* (Liverpool, 1991), p. 30; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 179.

with Ragatz's assertion that the case of Cropper is one in which 'conduct is not primarily influenced by self interest though they may accidentally collide'. Neither would it be correct to completely dismiss Anstey's assertion that Cropper's appeals to national prosperity masked a humanitarian concern.⁶⁵ It would perhaps be more accurate however, to argue that Cropper's motivation for involvement in the abolitionists' campaign was multi-layered and quite fluid. This was because he did not compartmentalise his activities as much as we might like him to have done. Williams' assertion that Cropper caused 'untold harm to the cause of humanitarianism' is a moot point, and even if it holds some truth, is over-simplified and far too stark.⁶⁶ Cropper's world view was perhaps seriously flawed, but not as clinical, or cynical as his more ardent critics claim. By his own terms at least, it was haulistic and, again by his own terms, based upon a genuine belief that it was 'God's plan' for all to enjoy liberty and prosperity.

⁶⁵ Davis, Introduction to R. Anstey, 'Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics', p. 210; Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*, pp. 435-6.

⁶⁶ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 187.

Chapter 4.

The Impolicy of Slavery: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4

From November 1823 to October 1824, a series of letters appeared in the Liverpool local press concerning the state and nature of slavery in the British Caribbean and the United States of America. The authors of these letters were John Gladstone M.P., a slaveholder in the Caribbean, and the East-Indies merchant and abolitionist, James Cropper.

Ironically, given their respective positions in this exchange, Cropper, before trading in East Indian goods, was a successful West Indian merchant and Gladstone was the owner of the *Kingsmill*, the first Liverpool ship to trade with India in 1814. Gladstone, chair of the West India Association through the most part of the campaign for emancipation and father to the future Prime Minister (William Ewart Gladstone) was very much a political and mercantile heavyweight locally and nationally at this time; Cropper could be seen as a man on the rise. Both men were mercantile, rather than industrial capitalists, with similar economic interests, each was known for his philanthropic activities in the city, and enjoyed considerable esteem among the local élite and public at large ¹

Their public debate on the subject followed the publication, on 31 October 1823, by *The Liverpool Mercury* of an anonymous article, 'Impolicy of Slavery', the authorship of which Cropper later acknowledged and the exchange was conducted through the *Mercury* and *The Liverpool Courier*.² Abandoning his anonymity, Cropper signed subsequent letters to the *Mercury* with his own name. Gladstone, on the other hand,

¹ G. Chandler, *Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1957), pp. 309, 409; E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; reprint, London, 1964), pp. 89-90.

² The article was originally published as a pamphlet in 1822.

signed his letters to the *Courier* and one to the *Mercury*, 'Mercator', only finally revealing his true identity on the publication of the whole correspondence. Cropper criticises his opponent for his anonymity in the closing paragraph of a letter dated 5 December 1823. Here Cropper pointedly remarks that his arguments concerning declining slave populations are strong enough to withstand opposition from 'men avowing their names, and still more are they sufficient to refute the bold, but unsupported, assertions of a nameless writer.'³ However, Mercator's true identity is hinted at during the exchange and references are made to ongoing discussions and rumours in the city about his identity. Considered alongside the other contemporary papers and letters included in the pamphlet, this exchange of letters seems to illustrate that at least the literate public in Liverpool were following with some interest the exchange between these two representatives of either side of the slavery debate.

Cropper announced his intention of publishing the letters and papers he had contributed, along with a critique of 'additional facts' drawn from his opponents' correspondence. In response, the West India Association published the letters from Cropper and Gladstone together with several other 'papers on the subject of slavery' in pamphlet form in February 1824, as a means of 'placing the merits of this great national question in a candid and impartial manner before the public ... in a more permanent form than the perishable columns of a newspaper'. The Association then offered to supply Cropper with 'any number' of these pamphlets at cost price.⁴

³ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury* 5 Dec 1823, in John Gladstone and James Cropper, *Correspondence on the Present State of Slavery in the British West Indies and in the United States of America* (Liverpool 1824; reprint, Shannon, 1972), p. 82.

⁴ Advertisement to Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, pp. i-iii.

Unsurprisingly, Cropper declined this offer. He certainly would not give consent for his arguments to be published and perhaps edited by his opponents, nor would he be inclined to help distribute the West India Association's pamphlets. Cropper wrote to the *Mercury* on 2 January 1824 claiming that, though he was keen for his letters to have 'the greatest publicity', he did not wish his name to appear to lend support or credence to his opponent's views by his writings being associated with them.⁵ We need only a cursory examination of the letters as they were published, to see that readers of the pamphlet would be extremely unlikely to suppose that Cropper would be endorsing pro-slavery arguments. Despite his justifiable misgivings, the pamphlet appears to be consciously well balanced, which is illustrated by the inclusion of the above letter. The letters are not compiled in chronological order, though this is not immediately apparent and perhaps makes the contributions made by Gladstone seem more logical and ordered. It is clear that both sides were certainly keen to have their arguments published as widely as possible, though preferably not at the risk of having them published and edited by their opponents.

These letters and papers are illustrative of the arguments and tactics adopted by protagonists on both side of the debate about slavery in Liverpool during the 1820s, and support Dr Currie's assertion that it was possible to engage in an open debate on the subject in the city.⁶ However, Currie's pleas, made at the beginning of the first campaign in 1788 that discussions on the subject be carried on in a civilised manner were, by the

⁵ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 2 Jan 1824, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, p. 113.

⁶ Personal correspondence of James Currie, cited in Anonymous, *Liverpool and Slavery: An Historical Account of the Liverpool-African Slave Trade* (1884; reprint, Liverpool, 1984), pp. 89-90.

start of the second campaign in the early 1820s, very much unheeded.⁷ Despite some moderation on both sides, Cropper and Gladstone present their arguments aggressively and with no small amount of personal hostility, each correspondent accusing the other of acting first to reduce the debate to something of a personal spat. In November 1823, the *Courier* published a letter from Gladstone, addressing the arguments made by Cropper in *Impolicy of Slavery*. In this letter, Gladstone underlines Cropper's eminence within abolition circles by referring to his views on slavery as 'notorious', and tries to belittle the arguments forwarded in the article by describing Cropper's manner as 'sly, yet earnest'.⁸ During this public exchange of views, Gladstone goes on to refer to Cropper's 'loose and dashing way', makes repeated references to 'gross exaggerations, misstatements and subterfuges', and accuses him of 'slander, scurrility and abuse'.⁹ Cropper responded in kind and, in his penultimate letter in the pamphlet, he makes the same accusation of 'scurrility and abuse' against the West India Association.¹⁰

Whilst the tone of these letters remains hostile throughout, the correspondents nevertheless manage to engage in a relatively sophisticated debate, drawing on economic, political and, almost inevitably, a good deal of anecdotal evidence. Given this, the letters provide us with very useful evidence of how the arguments about slavery were presented in the city and, importantly, how each side was attempting to appeal to the general public: in short, what was important to the interests of the people of Liverpool. Though knowingly leaving himself open to accusations of protecting and trying to benefit his East

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 89-90.

⁸ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 5 Nov 1823, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, p. 15.

⁹ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 4 Dec 1823; 20 Dec 1823; 3 Jan 1824 in *ibid.* pp. 62-73, 90-107, 119.

¹⁰ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 2 Jan 1824, in *ibid.* p. 113.

Indies interests, in *Impolicy of Slavery*, a pamphlet of 1822 which the *Mercury* reprinted in October 1823, Cropper defends abolitionists against accusations of attempting ruin the city's and country's economic prospects. He couched his arguments to appeal to his readership's commercial senses by concluding that Britain's and Liverpool's best economic interest was not, and had not been well-served by slavery and the slave trade. In the conclusion, he claims:

...among all the absurd and impolitic restrictions which still fetter our commerce, the greatest obstruction of all ... is to be found in the effects of the devastation made to procure slaves on the coast of Africa, and the sacrifices we are now making to support the system of slave cultivation in the West Indies.¹¹

In the article Cropper explains the logic behind his, by now, familiar position that poverty at home in England and Ireland, and the plight of slaves in the West Indies were part of one larger problem, and that their solution could be found in encouraging the importation of free grown' sugar from the East Indies. The previous year, he had written that East Indies sugar was 'the means that an allwise creator has in the nature of things appointed for the destruction of this abominable system whether of slave trade or slave cultivation'.¹² Cropper argues in *Impolicy of Slavery* that if the Irish were allowed to carry out manufacturing and trade freely; if the people of India were able to export their sugar and other goods in a fair market (with no subsidies for West Indian produce); and if the West Indian slaves were employed as free labourers, then all the sugar producing dominions would be able to operate successfully. Further, with free labourers working on the sugar plantations, the West Indies would become more productive and the workforce

¹¹ James Cropper, *Impolicy of Slavery* (Liverpool, 1822), reprinted in *The Liverpool Mercury*, 31 Oct 1823, in *ibid.* p. 15.

¹² James Cropper, personal correspondence to Zachary Macaulay, 5 Feb 1822, cited in D.B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (London, 1975), p. 62.

there, like that in the newly prosperous India, would be able to afford to buy the products of British and Irish industry, creating more wealth for all, at home and abroad.

Cropper set out this plan in a table (below), claiming his rather bold, broad assumptions as ‘facts’. On first reading, Cropper’s plan, crystallised in this way, may well have appeared very seductive to his readership, which is illustrated by Gladstone concentrating a good deal of his response on specifically refuting this evidence.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent clarity and correctness of his plan, it is clear that Cropper was guilty of massaging the ‘facts’ to fit his argument, and of basing his conclusions upon a large amount of guesswork and some very optimistic, unsubstantiated assumptions:

- I The consumption of cotton in Great Britain is about 160,000,000 of pounds annually.
- II If one half that quantity is consumed at home, it will be 4lb. for every individual, and no one who has seen much of the poor in England, and more especially of Ireland, will contend that even all our population are sufficiently clothed.
- III If the population of our Eastern Dominions took from us half a pound weight each of cotton goods, being one-eighth part of the rate of consumption in Great Britain, it would be enough to give ample employment to Ireland.
- IV The slaves in our West India islands, by being made free, would not only raise more produce, but also consume much more of our manufactures. Thus would Great Britain find within her own dominions abundant scope for the extension of her commerce, and share with the rest of the world the vast field which would be opened beyond them.
- V If the population of the world is estimated at 900,000,000, and if there habits were improved so as to enable them to consume as much as the population of the British dominions, it would probably amount to eight or ten times the extent of the present cotton manufactures *of the whole world*; leaving an ample field to reward the exertions of other countries which might adopt the same enlightened policy. But though with respect to Africa, it may truly be said, that the crimes and devastations of ages cannot be repaired at once; and ages may still elapse before she is restored to the state in which European commerce found her; and though this may be true, it is no argument against making a commencement.¹³

Although Cropper is critical of Europe’s history of plunder on the West coast of Africa, he couches his objections in economic as well as humanitarian terms, an

¹³ Cropper, *Impolicy of Slavery*.

argument he reinforces in his concluding paragraph, underlining his belief that benevolence made good commercial practice. Though his plan was certainly radical in a practical sense, Cropper is keen not to be seen as any kind of political radical here. He was aware of the problems of those who confronted orthodox thinking concerning commerce and trade, thinking with which he was to a great extent aligned, and when he does offer a challenge, he presents it as a change of economic emphasis, rather than of direction. His reference to Britain generally carrying out 'enlightened' commercial and industrial policies (despite the poverty he condemns) confirms this alignment and may serve to allay potential fears amongst his readership concerning his trustworthiness and patriotism. As a long-standing prominent abolitionist, reformer and religious Dissenter, Cropper was vulnerable to a variety of accusations, commonly made towards people of his religious or political stances, often with great effect (as was the case of the late eighteenth-century reformers in Manchester). Thus, Cropper's solution to poverty and oppression at home and abroad, when expressed in this way, may have had a chance of appealing to those responsible for, and profiting from this very poverty and oppression.

It is also interesting to note that Cropper based his solution around the manufacture and distribution of cotton goods, rather than any other industrial manufacturing advances currently taking place in Britain. As the neighbouring city of Manchester and the county of Lancashire constituted the centre of the world's cotton industry, and the port of Liverpool their conduit to the rest of the world, it would certainly be expedient to appeal explicitly to those whose local interests lay in cotton trade or manufacture. These were powerful people in Liverpool, Manchester and the rest

of the county, and would remain so throughout much of the nineteenth century, the people he perhaps needed most to convince.

Gladstone's initial response to *Impolicy of Slavery* attacked the article on all fronts. He counters each of Cropper's objections in a seemingly logical manner. He takes Cropper to task for both his economic and humanitarian stance. Throughout the exchange of letters, he disagrees that free labourers in the Caribbean would be more productive than slaves, arguing that 'manumitted Negroes are idle, indolent, slothful and too often become profligate, though they possessed good characters whilst they remained slaves'. He also puts forward the familiar argument that, when left to their own devices, Africans would avoid *proper* work in the field, asserting, 'whenever they have possessed the power, they have preferred to procure the means of support in any other way, however wrong and worthless', Throughout the exchange, Gladstone advocates the *proper* treatment of slaves, and apparently he treated his own slaves well.¹⁴ Although Gladstone does not explicitly outline what this should be, his views on the correct treatment of slaves can be inferred from the content of his letters.

In *Impolicy of Slavery*, Cropper accuses slave owners of excessive cruelty and causing the degradation of African people. He claims that the slaves were routinely whipped, were indiscriminately sold, separating their families, and for six months of the year had to work for 'one half the night, as well as the whole day'.¹⁵ Gladstone castigates Cropper for his never having been to the West Indies and endeavours to correct him, refuting these accusations at some length. He cites the planters' paternalistic nature and an understandable wish to safeguard their 'property', as factors that would automatically

¹⁴ J. Pollock, *Wilberforce* (Tring, 1977), pp. 287-8.

¹⁵ Cropper, *Impolicy of Slavery*.

militate against maltreatment of slaves. To support this, he then quotes selected legislation from various colonies, dating back to the mid-eighteenth century, which regulated slave punishments and provided stiff penalties for masters who mistreated their slaves. Gladstone justifies the slaves' meagre provision of food and clothing by claiming that 'within the tropics, a human being consumes less strong or animal food than in cold climates'. He answers Cropper's claim that the food allowance for a slave (which he listed) amounted to approximately half of that allotted to an inmate of an English prison, with a more fulsome list, which was put in place and protected by colonial law. Gladstone corrects Cropper once again, concerning the level and nature of work the slaves had to undertake, claiming that the daily work undertaken by a slave was 'not to equal two thirds of what is performed by a common labourer' in England.¹⁶

Gladstone denies that he intends to 'advocate slavery in the abstract', and concedes that slaves ought to be well treated, but asserted that their well being was adequately protected by current legislation and the good intentions of plantation owners. Alongside this, Gladstone reveals his qualified support for the harsh suppression of the uprising in Demerara, which had begun on one of his own plantations, deeming it regrettable, but very necessary. He adds that he feels that a period of greater 'caution', with the presence of a greater number of permanent troops garrisoned in the colonies, ought to and would follow.¹⁷ Whichever correspondent, if either, portrayed the true state of affairs on the plantations, it is clear that both were very much aware that the public

¹⁶ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 28 Nov 1823, 4 Dec 1823; John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 28 Nov 1823, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, pp. 41-2, 48-50, 66-7.

¹⁷ John Gladstone correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 5 Nov 1823, 4 Dec 1823, in *Ibid.* pp. 17, 22, 63; E. Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (Oxford, 1997), pp. xiii, 48.

actually cared about the slaves' well being, whatever their views regarding race, commerce and the institution of slavery.

Unsurprisingly, Gladstone is also critical of Cropper's economic argument. He rejects the economic viability of Cropper's plans to end slavery and poverty, by asserting that British possessions in the East Indies were incapable of producing enough sugar to meet demands, and by dismissing as unrealistically low the costs projected by Cropper for producing and importing sugar from India. It was not only Cropper's calculations that raised objections from Gladstone; as Chair of the West India Association and an owner of substantial plantations, he was understandably keen to defend the reputation of his own sugar. East-Indies sugar was in any case, Gladstone argues at some length, an inferior product to that of the West Indies, one that refiners could 'not be induced to use'. He concludes that if one were to make the correct calculations and allowances concerning duties and bounties, East-Indies sugar producers were not being unfairly discriminated against in the market, and the Indian people were interested in other branches of commerce anyway.¹⁸

Gladstone certainly seems to be covering all possible angles here, though the apparent logic of his argument does not stand up to scrutiny. His views on the relative productivity of slaves and free black labourers notwithstanding, if East Indian sugar producers were not being unfairly discriminated against and they were only capable of producing an inferior product and in insufficient quantities to meet demands, then only the West Indian producers would remain viable. It is difficult to say whether Gladstone was aware of the inconsistency of his arguments in making these defences of the situation

¹⁸ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 5 Nov 1823, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, pp. 15-23.

as it stood, but he continued to write in a similar vein, following similar tactics throughout the exchange.

Gladstone did not content himself solely with addressing Cropper's grand scheme to solve the world's ills. Although it appears that he felt he had answered each of Cropper's arguments in his first letter, he penned further responses to *Impolicy of Slavery*. These were published in the *Courier* in November and December, with Cropper's first contribution after his initial article, being published in the *Mercury* on the 21st November. In these letters Gladstone provides further *evidence* of the slaves' savagery, brutality and unsuitability for emancipation. He also answers the rather bold declaration made in Cropper's conclusion, bemoaning the abolition of the trade in slaves, citing the advantage that this handed to Britain's competitors and enemies and the economic losses that abolition had inflicted upon the city and the country at large.¹⁹ This is an indication that a sizable proportion of Liverpudlians believed that they had suffered economically to a significant degree by the loss of the Africa trade, or at least could be convinced to believe so. It would appear that this perception was exaggerated to a great extent; the port continued to thrive and expand after abolition of the trade throughout the nineteenth century.

Given this, and the fact that slave-trading Liverpool merchants tended to spread their investments in diverse ventures and therefore already had existing alternative investment opportunities, it may be fair to conclude that Gladstone was himself guilty of the protectionism with which he accuses Cropper. Abolition of the trade in slaves did not lead to disaster for slave traders in Liverpool, but it did mean that the planters had to bear

¹⁹ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 5 Nov 1823, in *ibid.* pp. 21-2.

the bulk of the burden of maintaining their slave populations, without the (legal) availability of freshly imported Africans.

This collection of correspondence also provides important information about the forces, which drove the arguments of both abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates. Obviously, economic concerns are never very far from the surface, but these manifest themselves in diverse, complex ways. Other motivating factors, such as strategic, political and humanitarian concerns are also apparent. Although both parties avoid framing their arguments in a manner which would make them appear extreme in any way and they seem to pull their punches occasionally (politically, if not always personally), a number of their motivations are illustrated quite clearly.

Gladstone appeals to readers' perceived racism and a widespread fear of further insurrections, perhaps leading to free black republics in the Caribbean, referring to the 'frightful fruits of emancipation' in Haiti. In a similar vein, he makes a familiar claim that Africans lacked acceptable morals, ascribing the inability of planters to maintain population levels to the destruction of the 'natural tendency to propagation' being destroyed by 'promiscuous intercourse, to which Africans were so much addicted, and from which they could not be restrained'.²⁰ Gladstone would have felt himself to be on relatively safe ground appealing to his readers' racial assumptions. The revolt in Demerara and the ramifications of the successful revolt in Haiti were still in the public consciousness, and attitudes of white supremacy, or more accurately, African inferiority and savagery were common, on either side of the debate about slavery.

²⁰ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 4 Dec 1823, 12 Dec 1823, in *Ibid.* pp. 65, 87-8.

The commonality of this Eurocentric racial view is illustrated by *The Globe and Traveller* newspaper which, two years after this exchange in opposition to the planters' view, recommended that proposals for gradual and selective amelioration of the slaves' conditions be adopted. The paper was alarmed at the prospect of more revolutionary, independent, black republics coming into being. Should the proposals not be adopted, planters were warned that they would suffer the same fate as their French counterparts in St. Domingue, 'whose only recompense for their losses has sprung from the seeds of civilisation which they have left behind in the minds of the black population'.²¹ It is interesting that Cropper's chosen medium during this exchange, *The Liverpool Mercury*, had responded to the proposals in a considerably more robust manner. It reported that opponents to the measures 'regretted that so partial a measure of amelioration should be adopted' and argued that it was absurd to expect colonial legislatures to adopt these measures voluntarily, claiming that:

The partial measures now proposed would have a pernicious effect both on masters and slaves; it would teach the former that disobedience was a profitable policy, and that the latter might be thrown by it into despair.²²

From his first response and continuing throughout the correspondence, Gladstone makes frequent references to the alleged baser nature of Africans, warning of their *natural propensity to* idleness and potential for mischief and violence if free, and confirming their apparent satisfaction with their status as slaves, unless they were agitated and goaded into action by ignorant meddlers, such as Cropper. He goes further, appealing to the humanitarian concerns of the *Mercury's* readers, by reiterating his views

²¹ *Globe and Traveller*, 8 Nov 1825, NMGM, D/CR/13.

²² *Liverpool Mercury*, 19 March 1824, NMGM, D/CR/13.

on the inferiority of African people and defending the labour regimes in the plantations by stating his belief that:

on those estates where the labour of the slaves is lightest, and where it is not duly regulated, their moral habits are worst, and the disposition to insubordination the greatest; but ... where they are regularly employed, ... without being overworked, their habits are best, their health good, and their minds contented and happy.²³

Gladstone's defence of slavery in this context does not necessarily require him to change his readers' fundamental perceptions. By referring to the abolitionists' humanitarianism in his own 'sly and earnest manner', he attempts to convince his readers, in both the pro-slavery *Courier* and the abolitionist *Mercury*, that the Africans' welfare is best left in the hands of Europeans rather than their own (more specifically, it should be in the hands of those experienced in West Indian affairs, that is, the current plantocracy).²⁴ It is interesting to note that Gladstone was writing under his *nom de plume*, 'Mercator'. His position on this issue would perhaps seem a good deal less tenable to his readers, if he were to reveal his own status as the absentee landlord of large estates (acquired through foreclosures) in Jamaica and Demerara, especially since his relevant experience and knowledge on the subject were confined to counting the profits or costs of his remote enterprise. Gladstone continues, arguing that slaves' welfare would suffer after emancipation, compared to their current regime, referring to evidence brought to the debate by other interested local citizenry.

Other anonymous correspondents had contributions included in the pamphlet. One, adopting the name 'Vindex', wrote a series of letters ostensibly to James Cropper, published in *The Liverpool Advertiser* over a similar period to the exchange between

²³ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 13 Dec 1823, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, p. 99.

²⁴ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 13 Dec 1823, *The Liverpool Courier*, 20 Dec 1823, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, pp. 96-104, 104-107.

Cropper and 'Mercator'.²⁵ Long extracts from these letters, written under the name 'Vindex', are included as an appendix of the published pamphlet, though not in their chronological order. Arguing from an apparently authoritative position, Vindex goes to great lengths to defend the condition of the slaves specifically in Jamaica, and by his own explicit extension, the rest of the West Indian colonies. Vindex claims to have been an opponent to the slave trade (dealt with later in this chapter); moreover, he steadfastly defends the planters, the colonial legislatures, and the slave system as a whole. The writer of these letters methodically dismisses Cropper's claims concerning the punishment of slaves, their working hours, the nature of their work, and the level of their religious instruction, not missing an opportunity to take the pro-abolitionist *Mercury* (along with Cropper) to task for their credulity in accepting dubious and 'silly' abolitionist evidence at face value.²⁶

The West India Association claimed that their inclusion in the pamphlet of extracts of these letters came about because either Gladstone or Cropper had referred to them during the course of their exchange.²⁷ This would seem to imply that, despite their authors' anonymity, they spoke with an authority accepted by both sides of the debate. Gladstone does cite Vindex's *expert* evidence to support his own reasoning, confidently asserting that, 'as respects the habits of the slaves, the regulation of their labour, and their general treatment in Jamaica, Mr Cropper has been completely answered by Vindex in

²⁵ One of these letters is dated 26 Dec 1824, but this seems to be a printing error. When cited herein, this letter is dated, 26 Dec 1823.

²⁶ Anonymous, 'Vindex' letters to James Cropper, *Liverpool Advertiser*, 13 Nov 1823, 29 Nov 1823, 19 Dec 1823, 26 Dec 1823, 2 Jan 1824, 10 Jan 1824, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, Appendix B, pp. i – xxviii.

²⁷ Advertisement to Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, p. ii.

The Liverpool Advertiser'.²⁸ On the other hand, Cropper dismisses notions of Vindex's authority on the grounds of his anonymity (and by implication, that of Gladstone), 'it would be better and more manly, when he makes charges and assertions on his own authority, if he would tell us who Vindex is'.²⁹ He only refers to the evidence and claims put forward by Vindex in order to refute them. This is illustrated by the dispute about religious provision and marriage for the slaves. Vindex rejects notions that the slaves were being neglected in this area and almost triumphantly cites a pamphlet, *Voice from Jamaica*, recently published by the Rev. G.W. Bridges of Manchester parish in Jamaica. In this pamphlet, the Rev. Bridges claims to have baptised 9,431 slaves, many of whom apparently attended church and some had learnt the Lord's Prayer or Ten Commandments. This seems an excessively high figure, but Bridges stretches credulity further with the claim that he had:

married one hundred and eighty seven couples of Negro slaves (in his own parish) within the last two years, all ... encouraged by their owners to marry. In another parish, St. Thomas in the East, ...there have been three times that number married during the incumbency of the present Rector ... and I can safely affirm, that the labours of the clergy, in the remaining nineteen parishes have been equally active, and, doubtless, crowned with the same success.³⁰

This presents Vindex's readers with a comforting picture of unintelligent, docile and happy slaves having all their spiritual wants and needs properly ministered by the planters and the Anglican Church. However, Bridges' figures seem to be a combination of the vague and the unbelievable. He provides no evidence to support the large number of baptisms and marriages he claims to have carried out. The number of marriages seems

²⁸ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 27 Nov 1823, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, p. 51.

²⁹ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 28 Nov 1823, in *Ibid.* p. 60.

³⁰ G. W. Bridges, *Voice from Jamaica* (1823), in 'Vindex' letters to James Cropper, *Liverpool Advertiser*, 13 Nov 1823 and 10 Jan 1824, in *Ibid.* Appendix B, pp. v-vi.

particularly difficult to accept; it appears that he performed an average of almost two marriage ceremonies per week, every week, for two years. If we add to this the very vague claims about the number of marriages performed (solely by Anglican priests) in other parishes, then we may feel that the Rev. Bridges' claims are certainly exaggerated, if not entirely fictitious.

Cropper certainly did not believe or accept this unsubstantiated evidence and found documentary evidence to refute it. He quotes at length from a debate in the House of Commons, which in part discussed *Voice from Jamaica* to show the inaccuracy and dishonesty of Bridges' claims. Returns from Jamaica showed that Bridges had not just exaggerated his and his colleagues' success, but had fabricated virtually all the evidence upon which the West India Association's chairman relied to make the case for the Established Church. The number of marriages 'legally solemnised' between slaves in the parish of Manchester during Bridges' incumbency was not 187, as claimed, but only three. Bridges' vague claims concerning 'the active labours of the clergy in other parishes' seem to be equally false. It appears that 'most of their labours had been crowned with much the same success as attended those of Mr Bridges'. Cropper then dismisses Vindex, and any contribution he may make to the debate: 'This being a subject on which this gentleman ought to be best of all informed, we shall not expect to hear much more of his statements'.³¹

Much of the debate about slavery centred on a religious argument: that is, which is the correct stance for Christians to adopt? We can see evidence of this in these letters. Cropper and his opponents are happy to accuse each other of lacking the correct Christian attitude. Cropper criticises Gladstone for allowing their correspondence to descend into

³¹ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 28 Nov 1823, in *Ibid.* p. 61.

personal abuse and then warns against allowing it to become a ‘theological dispute’, before launching an attack on his opponents, accusing them in fairly personal terms of ‘ignorance of the truths of Christianity’, and ‘violating its precepts, by holding their fellow men in slavery’. Gladstone, in a sarcastic response, accuses Cropper of hypocrisy and of sneering, which ‘ill becomes one who wears the garb of humility’.³²

This strand of the exchange is an illustration of the tensions between High and Low Church, which reflects the archetypal religious adherence of the protagonists; many of the abolitionists, though by no means all, were from Dissenting branches of Christianity and the Church of England was largely, though not exclusively, in favour of slavery. Cropper, Gladstone and Vindex all stress the importance of proper religious instruction for the slaves, with Cropper favouring and actively contributing to a pro-emancipation missionary campaign, whilst Gladstone and Vindex’s preferred body for converting and ministering to slaves was the Established High Church.³³ This stance came about through more than simple loyalty to their own church. Dissenting missionaries were considerably more successful in the West Indies than their Church of England counterparts, and this caused a fair degree of disquiet amongst the plantocracy. With their Old Testament images of freedom and revenge, the Baptists especially were successful in converting many slaves to Christianity.

In addition to such religious establishments providing a focus for the slaves away from the plantation, rousing orators could easily become the focus or even leaders of revolts, as with John Smith in Demerara. Gladstone is damning in his judgement of the

³² James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 21 Nov 1823; John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 4 Dec 1823, in *Ibid.* pp. 27-8, 67.

³³ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 13 Dec 1823, in *Ibid.* p.99; ‘Vindex’ letters to James Cropper, *Liverpool Advertiser*, 13 Nov 1823, 10 Jan 1824; *Ibid.* Appendix B, pp. v-vi.

actions of Dissenters in the Caribbean, explicitly blaming them for the revolt in

Demerara. He refers to:

emancipating emissaries, who under the pretence of giving religious instruction, corrupted [the slaves'] minds with the doctrines of emancipation, and the necessity of their taking the means to obtain it into their own hands.³⁴

Gladstone continues in a similar vein, pointedly accusing Dissenting churches in the West Indies of nurturing rebellion. Whilst denying that Africans were generally well disposed to 'divine worship', he asserts that 'Where it was otherwise, as on the east coast of Demerara ... other objects were discussed ... after their prayer meetings, which produced the insurrection there'.³⁵

As we may expect, since his own interests had been under considerable threat, Gladstone is sensitive about events in Demerara and is keen to criticise Cropper for his stance on the revolt there. He castigates Cropper for his alleged role in stirring the slaves into action, through the dissemination of his and other abolitionists' writings in the Caribbean. He takes Cropper to task for the tone of his discussion of the revolt. In his letter to the *Mercury* of 21 November, Cropper had referred to 'a great loss of Negro lives and so little of whites' in a passage criticising the nature of the laws concerning slaves in the West Indies.³⁶ Gladstone takes this statement out of context and deliberately misconstrues its meaning, making a serious allegation against Cropper and in the process once again questions his much vaunted adherence to Christian values:

I ask him what he means by so horrid an insinuation? Is this evidence of his Christian disposition? Does he mean to regret, that more whites were not murdered in cold blood, or felled in the field.³⁷

³⁴ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 4 Dec 1823, in *ibid.* p.67.

³⁵ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 13 Dec 1823, in *ibid.* p.99.

³⁶ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 21 Nov 1823, in *ibid.* p. 31.

³⁷ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 4 Dec 1823 in *ibid.* p. 69.

Gladstone once again touches on the issue of perceived white racial superiority here, attempting to appeal to his readers' fear of the Africans' savagery, underlining his agreement with the common assumption that black lives were of intrinsically lower value than white. Further, Gladstone is putting Cropper on the spot. In asking if Cropper regretted that so few whites died, he is implying that his opponent is a dangerous revolutionary of a similar ilk to John Smith, the Baptist minister held responsible for the Demerara revolt and sentenced to hang for it, though he died of consumption in prison, while awaiting a reprieve from the Crown.³⁸ Of course, Cropper was by no means advocating the wholesale murder of white colonists, but was making the point that the bloodshed in such uprisings was always heavily one-sided, that the slaves knew this and were only likely to take such action in the most extreme circumstances. In the light of Gladstone's opinion of the treatment of those involved in the Demerara uprising (outlined above), his hostility and enmity towards Cropper can clearly be discerned in their discussions of this particular issue.

We find evidence of Cropper's apparent wish for gradual emancipation within these letters. However, although Cropper argued here and elsewhere that he preferred such an approach, it may be erroneous to conclude, as some have done, that Cropper was a confirmed 'gradualist'.³⁹ His contemporaries did not necessarily believe that Cropper was an advocate of gradual emancipation. The anonymous author of the 'Vindex' letters to Cropper, published in *The Liverpool Advertiser*, not only defends the slaves' conditions, but also expends considerable energy discrediting the case for immediate emancipation. Constantly addressing the narrative of his correspondences to Cropper,

³⁸ Da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, pp. 273-4.

³⁹ Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, p. 63; M. Ferguson, *Subject to Others British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670 – 1834* (London, 1992), p. 258.

Vindex cites various worthies (including Pitt, Fox and Wilberforce) who had been involved in the abolition of ‘that disgraceful traffic, the slave trade’, and who all called for an unhurried process of liberation for the enslaved Africans. The reference to these men of great standing may well have convinced the *Advertiser*’s readers, if not Cropper himself, that if the slaves were to be freed, it must be carried out at a more leisurely pace than that favoured by Cropper.⁴⁰

Cropper’s letter dated 28 November 1823 illustrates this apparent confusion about his genuine stance. Here, he states that it would indeed be dangerous to grant freedom to slaves before they were ready for it, however that might be defined. However, in the same letter, he appears to adopt a more immediate position, arguing that abolitionists should campaign for the removal of bounties paid to bolster the market strength of plantation-grown sugar:

Show the people its [slavery’s] Impolicy, and ...the necessity of taking away the support that they are now giving to it, and without which it cannot long exist; - let us touch this point, and we touch the very life of the system ... we must take the thing as it now is, and adopt the most direct, rational, and effectual means of extirpating the evil.⁴¹

It could be argued that when Cropper pulled his political punches by arguing for a gradual emancipation, it was to guard against him appearing, in Wilberforce’s words, ‘too obnoxious to public prejudice’. Perhaps, these arguments were couched in this way in the belief that the emancipation process, once in train, would be impossible to stop and quick to reach its conclusion. Calling for gradual emancipation at the same time as campaigning for measures which would (he believed) help bring about or perhaps even

⁴⁰ ‘Vindex’ letters to James Cropper, *Liverpool Advertiser*, 13 Nov 1823, 29 Nov 1823, 19 Dec 1823, 26 Dec 1823, 2 Jan 1824, 10 Jan 1824, in Gladstone and Cropper, *Correspondence*, Appendix B, pp. i – xxviii.

⁴¹ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 28 Nov 1823, in *Ibid.* p. 56.

guarantee a more rapid success, could help allay fears that existed in some schools of thought, concerning the conduct of the slaves once they had been freed. These were fears which Gladstone and other pro-slavery advocates were keen to provoke and exploit. A number of his opponents had interests very strongly tied to the maintenance of the slave system, despite Cropper's claims of the superior productivity of free labour over slave labour. Opponents such as these would never concede his argument, but if Cropper could convince the more disinterested in Liverpool and across the country that the planters' fears were unfounded, and that increased prosperity and stability would inevitably ensue from emancipation, then the planters' ability to persuade the British public on this point would diminish, along with their political power.

It is certainly true that the planters' ability to lobby for support from the government in London was on the wane, and their power was to diminish further. Economic and therefore political power increasingly lay with the new industrial capitalists, not least those with an interest in cotton in the North West of England. Political and philosophical stances were changing in Britain at this time. It can be seen that as the middle classes' economic strength grew, their power and influence were increasing too. Changes in political and philosophical orthodoxy underlined their increased economic and political power and, importantly, reflected their vested interests. Ideologically, the slave system with its attendant subsidies rendering its operation a virtual monopoly, did not sit easily with this emerging class, the advocates and beneficiaries of *laissez-faire* economics. If abolitionists could quell the fears of the growing ranks of industrial capitalists, and then gather significant support from them, their success would be assured, and quickly gained.

Capitalist self-interest is never very far from the surface of these letters. The two main protagonists swap accusations of protecting their own interests at the expense of the common good. There seems to be some justification for this. Gladstone was certainly keen to maintain the value of his profitable West Indian assets, and Cropper's East Indian interests rendered him vulnerable to a similar charge. It is on the question of Cropper's stance on slavery in the United States that his position seems weakest. Unlike his fellow Liverpoolian abolitionist, Edward Rushton, who made clear his opposition to slavery in the United States, Cropper had a somewhat ambivalent view of the cotton plantations in the American South. Cropper's plan to free the West Indian slaves and rid Britain and Ireland of poverty revolved around the manufacture of chiefly slave-grown cotton goods. Gladstone clearly recognises this weakness. In his initial response to Cropper's article, he writes:

with the aid of his [Cropper's] map, the interests of the East India sugar growers are put forward; ... whilst he leniently lets off, and not without comparatively indirect praise, his *slave-owning* connexions in the United States, who consign their cotton, *the produce of the labour of slaves*, to his house in Liverpool for sale.⁴²

The accusation of hypocrisy appears justified, especially when we consider Cropper's criticism of the harsh retribution meted out to the slaves after the uprising in Demerara. Slave revolts in the United States were dealt with no less violently than those in the Caribbean.

Cropper answered this charge by asserting that he was no longer involved in the importation of American cotton, and further, that it would be injurious to the slaves to 'reject the produce' of their labour, rather disingenuously arguing that by buying slave-grown goods from the United States, he was helping to alleviate their condition.

⁴² John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 5 Nov 1823, in *Ibid.* pp. 15-16.

Conversely, since in Cropper's view slavery in British colonies was 'slavery in the worst form it ever existed', purchasing slave-grown produce from there could help bolster a corrupt, cruel and commercially unsound system. Over the following weeks the correspondents revisited this area several times. Cropper argued that the system in the United States was more progressive and less cruel than that which existed in the British West Indies; that, unlike their British-owned counterparts, the slave communities on American plantations were maintaining their population levels and even increasing their number, despite the unavailability of freshly imported slaves.⁴³ Gladstone in response claims that illegal slave trading was maintaining the populations on American plantations and challenges Cropper as to whether his assertion that these increases were the result of 'natural increase and good management' should be imputed 'to wilful misrepresentation, or to a want of knowledge of the subject'.⁴⁴ Gladstone seems to have won this part of the exchange. Though he made no attempt to hide his prior involvement in importing slave-grown cotton, Cropper was still very vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy, or at least illogical thinking. However, given the rapid and massive growth of the cotton industry in Lancashire and the huge revenue it produced locally, not least in the port of Liverpool, Cropper was in no position to argue that Britain should refrain from importing its raw materials, wherever and however they were produced. In mitigation of Cropper's position, there was one fundamental difference between British West Indian and American slavery. The produce of American slavery was not propped up in the market by British duties and bounties; it was perhaps the commercial argument, rather than the humanitarian one, which held most sway.

⁴³ James Cropper, correspondence to *The Liverpool Mercury*, 21 Nov in *Ibid.* pp. 26-7.

⁴⁴ John Gladstone, correspondence to *The Liverpool Courier*, 28 Nov, in *Ibid.* pp. 26-7.

Alternatively, Cropper might be guilty of a certain amount of disingenuity, making a commercial argument for a humanitarian goal. Given that his figures do not bear too close a scrutiny and (as discussed in the previous chapter) he was actively campaigning against American slavery in the 1830s, on the eve of emancipation in the British Caribbean colonies, either Cropper had changed his mind about American slavery, or he was reluctant to speak out against it for other reasons. Perhaps he was unwilling to appear to be threatening the stability and profitability of the Lancashire cotton manufacturers, whom he recognised to be the emerging dominant economic and political class. From 1819, Cropper was also active along with an American abolitionist, Benjamin Lundy, though not publicly, in attempting to create the economic argument against slavery in the United States. Free-trade competition from the Caribbean and India, he argued, would lead to greater efficiency and lower prices, thus forcing the Americans to see the commercial (if not moral) error of their ways and free their slaves, in order to continue in production. However, he was aware that his figures were optimistic, and that if the American slaves were not freed, current low prices would lead to a lack of investment by plantations, leading to demand for cotton outstripping its supply and prices would rise. Along with Adam Hodgson, Cropper was not above speculating against his abolitionist sympathies and both men's companies attempted to profit from the potential failure of their abolitionist campaigns.⁴⁵ We can see Cropper was clearly an astute businessman who was capable of manipulating markets and furthering his own capitalist interests. Further, his dissembling on the American slavery question displays his political

⁴⁵ J. Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels', Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, *Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Slavery and Women's Rights* (25-8 Oct 2001), available at <<http://www.yale.edu/glc/conference/civin>> (retrieved 4 April 2004).

acumen and an acute understanding of middle-class sensibilities, tailoring the focus of his arguments to suit their context and his audience, without fundamentally altering their objectives.

This exchange reflects how abolitionists and the defenders of slavery framed their arguments and illustrates the factors that the protagonists felt to be important to their readers. We can also detect the personalising of the debate, the pitching of ‘good’ against ‘evil’, which when taken in isolation presents a rather misleading picture of the abolition and emancipation processes. This is a view that the abolitionists themselves engendered and that suggests that it was largely political agitation in Britain that brought about the end of slavery, ignoring the broader economic and political concerns along with the actions of the slaves themselves. However, when we consider the evidence contained in these letters along with these broader economic and political forces working locally, nationally and internationally, we can see that the contemporary debate was fluid and capable of relative sophistication, with protagonists at a local level reacting and responding to events happening on the broader stage. Arguments from both sides were often aimed at largely similar assumptions held by the public, or at least at assumptions the authors perceived the literate public to hold. The importance of correct religious instruction, the proper care and treatment of the slaves, the moral and intellectual inferiority of Africans, the importance of trade and prosperity, political stability at home and in the colonies, and Britain’s privileged and dominant position in world affairs are all examples of the preoccupations and assumptions held by abolitionists and pro-slavers alike.

These issues are addressed in this exchange, and it is interesting to note that for the most part, there is little difference between the large-scale aspirations of the supporters of both causes, the institution of slavery notwithstanding. The theological dispute that Cropper claims he wished to avoid, but then vigorously pursued can be seen in the broader context of enfranchisement in Britain. With the major civil positions being the reserve of adherents to the Church of England, campaigning activities, such as slave abolition can be seen as a rare possibility for political involvement and some degree of empowerment for Dissenters. Gladstone's eagerness to tar all Dissenters and all abolitionists with the same brush can also be seen in this broader context. Whilst this certainly coloured the theological aspect of the exchange, the importance of the correct Christian position should not be understated. The slavery debate split religious organisations as much as it did other societal groups (this is evinced by the stances adopted by the bishops Horley of St. Davids and Porteus of Chester, then London). The scriptures are not entirely clear on the subject and as such were open to interpretation and debate. Whatever the correct stance should prove to be, the overwhelming majority of the British public, abolitionists and planters included, would not wish to be seen opposing the scriptures, or acting against their teachings.

The theological dispute also connected with another common assumption, that of the supposed inferiority of the African people. Both sides of the debate appealed to this orthodox view of Africans. Planters claimed to be *civilising* the naturally savage, promiscuous and indolent slave population; an argument put forward by many advocates of slavery and supported in these letters by Gladstone. Abolitionists largely responded by either claiming that Africans were fellow human beings, whose treatment at the hands of

Europeans was an abomination, or that though certainly inferior to Europeans, they were by nature, docile and benign *creatures*.

Cropper's stance in these letters seems to be that Africans and Europeans were equal under God. However, he clearly recognised the currency of the opposite view and tailored his arguments so that they would not be offensive to potential supporters, who held a view of white supremacy. Indeed, when discussing the question of gradual emancipation, he does state somewhat ambiguously that the slaves, due to their degradation, may not yet have been fit for freedom.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that in Cropper's grand scheme, the plantations in the West Indies would still be employing Africans to work in the fields and boiling houses, albeit under a different labour regime, which does not seem to represent much of an advance in status for the black field workers. Being seen to be moderate, if not vague, on the question of African intellectual and moral equality as well as that of gradual or immediate emancipation, seems to have been a concern of Cropper's during this exchange.

The question of the correct treatment of the slaves, in conjunction with the religious and racial questions, is illustrative of the fluid nature of the debate and the issues surrounding it. It is possible to detect a shift in the public's view here; whatever their racial status, cruelty to slaves was increasingly being seen as intolerable. Gladstone, though reputedly a kind master, had no compunction in declaring his slaves to be racially inferior to Europeans, but seemed to feel the need, perhaps for the first time, to justify their meagre provisions and mean existence and to deny repeated accusations of cruel punishments. The tone he adopted when writing about this issue and the lengths to which his letters go in an attempt to dismiss Cropper's 'gross misstatements and exaggerations'

⁴⁶ See note 39 above.

suggest that he was aware of this shift in thinking and, like Cropper, was concerned that he should be considered to occupy a 'moderate' position.

This very public and controversial exchange illustrates the nature of the growing opposition that representatives of the Caribbean planters (and by extension, the pro-slavery lobby) faced. As B.W. Higman asserts, 'The opponents who forced a collective voice from the West India interest were the humanitarians, the free traders, and the East India and landed interests'.⁴⁷ As his proposals were constructed of arguments from each of these positions, Cropper's position was in complete opposition to that of the Chairman of the West India Association of Liverpool. This, alongside Cropper's location in the city, meant that his outpourings would almost inevitably have to be publicly addressed by Gladstone. Further, these letters provide a snapshot of the anti-slavery debate in a city with a traditional antipathy to abolitionism, and where many merchants still stood to profit directly from trading in slave-grown goods, if no longer in slaves. Both Gladstone and Cropper, as prominent members of Liverpool's élite society, were aware of their readership's main concerns and how these concerns reflected changing perceptions in the areas of religion, humanitarianism and trade.

Whereas we can see Gladstone as a traditional mercantile capitalist, Cropper, though from a similar commercial background, seems more in tune with contemporary thinking. Cropper appears to recognise the importance of the new industrial manufacturers to the growth of the economy a little more clearly than his opponents, and his arguments seem to appeal more directly to their philosophy of free trade, than does Gladstone's defence of the existing *artificial* market. Cropper's bold, optimistic plan to eradicate poverty, free the slaves and create prosperity for all was centred on the trade

⁴⁷ B. W. Higman, 'The West India Interest in Parliament', *Historical Studies* (Australia), 13 (1967), p. 9.

and manufacture of cotton goods, the cotton industry being a major driving force of Britain's rapid industrial growth and the central power in Lancashire's industrialisation.

We can see from these letters, that though humanitarian and religious issues were considered to be worthy of cleverly constructed, highly detailed and often hostile argument, issues that impacted on economic prosperity were perhaps fought over most keenly. In this area it may be safe to conclude that Cropper had the edge. Though his assertions often seem to be as unreliable and his economic reasoning not necessarily any sounder than Gladstone's, Cropper's arguments were targeted at what had now become the new orthodoxy.

Chapter 5.

Manchester Abolitionists

If, as Williams attests, the history of the rise of Liverpool can be seen as the history of the rise of transatlantic slavery, then there is an even stronger case for viewing the history of Manchester's rise as the history of the rise of the cotton industry.¹ Further, cotton manufacture was one of the key forces in Britain's rapid industrialisation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; as Eric Hobsbawm asserts, 'He who says Industrial Revolution says cotton'.² Given that the cotton manufacturing industry relied on slave-grown raw materials and provided finished goods for purchasing slaves in Africa, we can see that Manchester played a major role in the trade in slaves and the slave system.

Having grown rapidly during the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Manchester area (containing the townships which became the two cities of Manchester and Salford and the surrounding townships of Cheetham, Hulme, Chorlton Row and Ardwick) can be seen to have drawn great economic benefit from its involvement with the slave trade and slave-grown goods.³ A directory from 1800 lists over 1400 manufacturers and merchants, who were processing or dealing in cotton in Manchester.⁴ With the growth of the factory system of production, Lancashire experienced a cotton boom, with former villages growing into busy, populous towns and cities. The population of Manchester had grown from around 17,000 in the 1760s to somewhere in the region of 180,000 by the 1830s. The city provided an economic focus for the manufacturing towns of Lancashire and North

¹ E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; reprint, London, 1964), p. 34.

² E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London, 1969), p. 56.

³ For the sake of simplicity, the whole area will be referred to as Manchester.

⁴ *Bancks's Manchester and Salford Directory 1800* (reprint, Manchester, 1997), pp.1-52.

Cheshire, becoming both a manufacturing centre in its own right and a commercial centre rivalling Liverpool in regional and national importance.

Eric Williams recognises the importance of the close and changing relationship between Liverpool and Manchester in his 'decline thesis' which links the rise of industrial capitalism and the demise of slavery. He argues that Manchester owed its initial growth in the era of mercantile capitalism to the port of Liverpool. However, the rise of industrial capitalism led to Liverpool becoming increasingly dependent on its role as a conduit for Manchester's raw materials and manufactured goods - in effect its 'suburb'.⁵ While this view is certainly over simplified, if not flawed, it does underline the importance of the links between the two cities and their somewhat symbiotic relationship. Peter Smith, who earned his living in Manchester in 1788 specifically as a 'Liverpool News Carrier', illustrates the strong links between the two cities, and the importance of events in Liverpool to Mancunians in the late eighteenth century.⁶

Williams certainly over simplified the nature of the relationship between the two cities. Whilst Manchester's business was increasingly important to Liverpool, the port would have continued to be busy and prosperous, even without the trade and income produced by its neighbour's factories. There was a thriving coastal trade and the city provided an international outlet for West-Midlands manufactured goods, textiles from West Yorkshire, salt and chemicals from Cheshire and South Lancashire in addition to importing timber, sugar and other raw materials for these industrial areas. The port was also the point of exit for much of the European migration to the New World.⁷ The close geographic and economic links and continually improving communications between the cities meant that there was a flow of news, money and

⁵ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 162.

⁶ Elizabeth Raffald, *Manchester Directory for 1772* (reprint, Manchester, 1982).

⁷ This is discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

goods between the two cities. Perhaps more importantly, political activists and their ideas were able to make the same short journey.

Despite Manchester's industrial growth and economic modernity, government of the local area during almost all of the period of organised anti-slavery agitation was still administered along complicated, quasi-feudal lines. The city was not incorporated, nor was it represented in Parliament. This was in contrast to Liverpool, which had long been incorporated and sent two members to Parliament. Each year at Michaelmas, the medieval Manchester Court Leet, summoned by the Lord of the Manor of Manchester, would elect the Borough Reeve, constables and other manorial officers, who were largely responsible for law and order. The Police Commission, established in 1792, supervised the night watch and fire engine establishments and was responsible for diverse services, including scavenging, street cleaning and lighting. The Police Commission was also responsible for Manchester's first gas lighting in 1807. In order to administer justice, eighteen county magistrates acted in the area, including one stipendiary magistrate. Local poor relief was in the hands of the churchwardens, whilst the overseers of the poor paid the Constables' accounts.⁸

This presents a very complex, if rudimentary, picture of local government in the Manchester area. Given this inadequate governance and its rapidly growing, largely disadvantaged population, the city had perhaps unsurprisingly gained a reputation for disorder and unruliness. It seems fair to argue, as Donald Read does, that the only reason the administration maintained any semblance of order and coherence was due to several of its branches being controlled by the same people.

⁸ C. B. Philips and J. H. Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540* (London, 1994), pp. 89-90; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 106; D. Read, *Peterloo: The Massacre and its Background* (Manchester, 1958), pp. 2-3; Raffald, *Manchester Directory for 1772*; Lewis's *Directory of Manchester for 1788* (reprint, Manchester, 1982); Banks's *Manchester and Salford Directory 1800*; C. Aspin, *The First Industrial Society: Lancashire 1750 – 1850* (Preston, 1995), p. 188; F. Vigier, *Change and Apathy, Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1970), pp. 122-4.

This élite group, who were largely Tory and Anglican, included the magistrates, the principal officers of the Court Leet and leading Police Commissioners, and formed a ‘close knit oligarchy’.⁹ Despite its rapid and continuing demographic and economic growth, Manchester was, in terms of the area it covered, a relatively small settlement: a rather intimate collection of townships. As in Liverpool, members of the local political, intellectual and business élite were well known to each other, as were the local radical activists and their sympathisers.

The cotton, which drove the rapid economic growth in the county of Lancashire and the city of Manchester, was largely slave-grown. Manchester cloth was an important export commodity in the first leg of the triangular trade, being used to buy slaves on the west coast of Africa and to supply the needs of the West Indian plantation communities. Further, Manchester merchants, in common with those of other Northwestern towns, had ample opportunity and reason to invest directly in the Liverpool-based Africa trade. However, the close connections between shipbuilders and the slave trade in Liverpool were not replicated to the same extent in Manchester. It is possible to identify a number of examples where there was a relationship between cotton masters and the slave trade. For instance, there were two Manchester cotton merchant families (Touchet and Diggles) with extensive financial interests in the Africa trade, and one company (Hibberts), which in addition to supplying cloth to the slave trade along with other Manchester merchants, owned sugar plantations in Jamaica.¹⁰

The majority of these traders did not make their direct links to the slave trade explicit locally. Thomas Diggle Esq. of Deansgate and Blakely and John Diggle, a fustian cutter of Jackson Row, are listed in the 1772 Manchester Directory. In the 1800

⁹ Read, *Peterloo*. p. 3.

¹⁰ Philips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, pp. 89-90; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, pp. 70-71.

directory, three Diggles are listed as ‘blue dyer’, a fustian cutter and a ‘smallware weaver’. The directory of 1772 lists three Touchets; a Miss Touchet of Ridge-field and James and Thomas, ‘check manufacturer’ and ‘Gent.’ respectively, both of King Street. Their name is spelt ‘Touchett’ in the 1788 listing, perhaps reflecting anglicised pronunciation and a desire to distance themselves from any French connections. Their business interests are listed as the manufacture of fustian and check and remain so in 1800. The plantation-owning Hibberts are listed in the same three directories, with a variety of business interests, including check manufacturer, wine merchant and fustian manufacturer. George Hibbert was Member of Parliament for Seaford and spoke against abolition in Parliament in February 1807. He argued that abolition was a ‘visionary theory ... [one of] those wild projects of reform, to which the spirit of modern philanthropy has given birth’.¹¹ Whereas in Liverpool, associations with the Africa trade were celebrated, in these three cases, no mention is made of any activities directly linked with the slave trade.¹²

Nevertheless, some more explicit links to the slave trade may be found amongst the city’s manufacturers. A number of textile firms advertised their businesses as supplying the slave trade. Richard Powell and Charles Ford were both trading as manufacturers of check and African goods from premises in King Street and Brown Street respectively in 1788. William Hanson also advertised his business in Cannon Street as a manufacturer of check and African goods in the same year. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Edward Hanson, who was then running the Cannon Street premises advertised his business merely as a ‘manufacturer’. In the 1800 directory, John Parke is listed as an ‘African check manufacturer’, trading from

¹¹ J. Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade, 1783-1807* (London, 1997), p. 111; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* pp. 70-71, 88.

¹² Raffald, *Manchester Directory for 1772*; Lewis’s *Directory of Manchester for 1788*; Bancks’s *Manchester and Salford Directory 1800*.

premises in Chancery Lane. Robinson and Heywood traded from Mosely Street in Manchester and were listed as ‘manufacturers of fustians and African goods’ in the 1788 directory. By 1800, the firm was listed solely as ‘manufacturers of African goods’.¹³

The Touchets provide further evidence to illustrate the complicated relationship between old and new mercantile interests, the interests of operatives and the motivation for support for or opposition to abolitionism. As early as 1751, Lancashire weavers complained to Parliament of the virtual monopoly that the Touchets and another merchant, Joseph Hague (who had moved to London from Glossop), enjoyed over the importation of raw East Indian cotton through London, under the auspices of the Levant Company. They also controlled its processing and export. This cotton was worked in Manchester and made its way, through Liverpool, to the west coast of Africa in the form of anabasses cloth, thus tying the Lancashire textile industry (particularly the Touchet’s interests) to the British slave trade.¹⁴

As West Indian and (more importantly) American cotton increasingly began to enter the west coast of Britain during the middle years of the eighteenth century, the nature of the cotton trade altered quite significantly. Instead of merchants such as the Touchets controlling the importation of raw cotton, its processing, and the export of finished cloth, independent dealers concentrated their efforts solely on selling raw cotton, and manufacturers began to use agents based abroad to conduct their export business for them. This had become possible due to New World cotton breaking the Levant Company’s monopoly and the easing of legal restrictions, which protected the established linen and woollen weaving concerns at the expense of the new cotton industry. Here we can see conflicts of interest emerging in Manchester around the

¹³ *Lewis’s Directory of Manchester for 1788*, pp. 10-11, 20-21; *Bancks’s Manchester and Salford Directory 1800*, pp. 20, 35, 38.

¹⁴ Philips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, pp. 89-90

issues of protected markets and free trade. To the new merchants of Manchester, the opening up of the textile trade enabled growth in both manufacturing and mercantile opportunities at the same time as established monopolies of protected textile concerns were threatened. As far as the textile operatives of Lancashire were concerned, competition for their services amongst traders in raw cotton and the growing number of cotton manufacturers would potentially increase their income, making free trade as appealing to them as it was increasingly to their masters.

Given the city's reliance on slave-grown cotton, the West African market for much of its manufactured cloth and its necessarily close economic ties to Liverpool, Manchester seems an unlikely base for organised abolitionist activity. We might suppose that the anti-slavery cause would not have enjoyed much popular local support. However, unlike their counterparts in Liverpool, Manchester abolitionists were famously at the forefront of the campaigns against the slave trade. The city remained a hotbed of reform and radical politics, with activists able to mobilise large numbers of supporters locally in the face of a good deal of hostile and often violent opposition from the authorities.

As in Liverpool, organised opposition to the slave trade was led by a group of largely middle-class reformists, who were mostly, though not exclusively, religious Dissenters. Unlike their Liverpoolian counterparts however, formal and active opponents of slavery and the slave trade in Manchester were more widely spread across the social spectrum. In the light of this, we should perhaps be seeking a wider range of forces motivating abolition in Manchester. Simplified notions of protecting perceived economic self-interest were unlikely to have applied to all activists.

Manchester was also the leading area for women's involvement in the early campaign. More than a quarter of subscribers to the Manchester Abolition Society

were women (68 out of a total of 302), against a national average of around a tenth.¹⁵ The opposition to slavery can be seen to have been a good deal more organised, broad-based and active in Manchester than in Liverpool. This was recognised by pro-slave trade advocates in Liverpool in the eighteenth century, who addressed their arguments to Manchester abolitionists. They appealed to their sense of patriotism as well as their perceived self-interest as merchants and manufacturers.¹⁶ These were broadly the same appeals that Liverpoolian abolitionists made to Manchester merchants in the campaign for emancipation in the 1820s and 1830s which demonstrates the commonality of interest in the leadership of both sides of the slavery debate.¹⁷

Liverpool activists' focus on their counterparts in Manchester is partially explained by the Roscoe circle's close business and social relations to those involved in the Manchester/Africa trade. Whilst there was certainly a more concerted effort made by Liverpool abolitionists than they are generally credited with, they had little success in mobilising broad support for the cause within the city and across the North West of England. This rendered them a less immediate cause for concern to pro-slavery advocates in their home city than their more vocal, active and considerably more troublesome counterparts in Manchester. However, it is possible to question the motives of abolitionists in Manchester. Perhaps religious Dissenters and other disenfranchised individuals were taking a rare opportunity to flex their political muscles. Eric Williams argues that anti-slavery was something of a flag of convenience for the disenfranchised manufacturers in the area, with free trade and political representation being the issues that provided the driving force for their

¹⁵ C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London, 1992), pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ Anonymous, *Liverpool and Slavery: An Historical Account of the Liverpool-African Slave Trade* (Liverpool 1884, 1984 edition), pp. 79-84.

¹⁷ Examples of literature based around such appeals are discussed in chapter 3, 'James Cropper's Rise to Prominence'.

activism.¹⁸ Following the 1832 reform of Parliament, Manchester was represented by two MPs. At a dinner given to celebrate his election, one of these men, Mark Philips, a correspondent and ally of James Cropper, gave a speech in which he urged his audience (to loud cheers of encouragement) to continue to agitate for liberty, especially for the slaves of the West Indies. He asked:

if liberty could possibly be enjoyed by any rational men without the desire to communicate it to others? ... Shall it always be that one man should be a slave because he is black, and another free because he is white? I tell you, that until we wash out this foul pollution from the institutions of our country, liberty itself is not safe anywhere.¹⁹

Williams comments on this, asserting that the ‘foul pollution was not slavery but monopoly’.²⁰ Williams is again perhaps guilty of over simplifying the argument here. His claim may hold water with a proportion, if not the majority, of the middle-class abolitionists in Manchester. However, local activists came from diverse backgrounds. In their minds many issues of liberty and reform were interconnected, and they continued to be sympathetic to the cause.

The evidence considered in this study does suggest a strong and significant relationship between the growth of industrial capitalism and the ending of slavery in British colonies. Further, it is argued here that abolitionist appeals to the ideology of *laissez-faire* were the ones that had most impact amongst the increasingly powerful industrial middle class. Nevertheless, although agreeing with Williams to some extent on these issues, it would be erroneous to discount the existence of genuine humanitarian principles amongst abolitionists and reformers in Manchester and elsewhere. As pointed out by Williams himself, when William Cobbett, the ‘workers’

¹⁸ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* pp. 154-7.

¹⁹ Report of the speeches at the Great Dinner in the Theatre, Manchester, to celebrate the election of Mark Philips and the Rt. Hon. C. P. Thompson (John Rylands Library, Manchester), cited in *Ibid.* p. 156. Cropper addressed his pamphlet, *Another Bonus to the Planters: or the Advantage Shewn of an Equitable Purchase of the Monopoly and Bounty on West India Sugar* (London, 1833) to Smith. This is discussed in chapter 4, ‘James Cropper’s Rise to Prominence’.

²⁰ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* p. 156.

champion', tried to gain approval from the Manchester electorate to represent the city in Parliament, he was rejected. His record of hostility towards prominent abolitionists, especially William Wilberforce alongside his previous ambivalence towards the cause (discussed below), counted against him. He had come round to support anti-slavery after a fashion, but as Williams says, 'his conversion' came too late.²¹ Perhaps the radical and reform leadership was liable to waver in terms of principle, but the newly enfranchised amongst the activists of the city largely maintained their political positions.

Elizabeth Heyrick's pamphlet of 1824, *Immediate not Gradual Abolition*, which was published in Manchester anonymously, shows that the Mancunian anti-slavery campaigns were not necessarily driven primarily by economic interests, nor were their arguments necessarily directed towards those who might be most easily persuaded by them. The pamphlet claims: 'If the deadly root of slavery be ever extirpated out of British soil, it will be by such exertions as are prompted by duty rather than interest.'²² Illustrating its author's steadfast stance, *Immediate not Gradual Abolition* goes on to argue that the abolitionist cause was hampered by gradualist approaches, which led to their campaigns losing ground and allowed what Heyrick considered to be the bullying tactics of the planters and their representatives to succeed. The pamphlet makes a withering attack on supporters of gradual emancipation. There is perhaps some justification for this stance towards the gradual position. Moderate abolitionists continued to argue throughout the campaign for an unhurried process and for appropriate compensation to be paid to the planters. Given this, it is perhaps not unreasonable to conclude that the moderate and occasionally

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 155.

²² Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate not Gradual Abolition; or an Inquiry into the Shortest, Safest, and most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery* (Manchester, 1824), p.2.

fudged demands they made impaired the abolitionists' chances of success.²³ Whilst many abolitionists privately preferred a more steadfast approach, they were unwilling to take issue with their more moderate allies and push for stronger demands and activity. Perhaps they did not wish to be considered, in Wilberforce's words, persons 'of the wrong sort ... obnoxious to public prejudice' and wished to avoid censure from the national antislavery leadership.²⁴ However, the supporters of gradual abolition were often, like Wilberforce, unsympathetic to the plight of industrial workers. In the light of this, Heyrick's appeal may have garnered supporters from the working class as well as middle-class radicals and reformers in Manchester.

Protagonists from both sides of the debate had supposed that the institution of slavery would die a 'natural death' after the abolition of the slave trade. However, in *Immediate, not Gradual Emancipation*, Heyrick claims that it was showing no sign of so doing and nor would it, while abolitionists continued to adopt a gradualist approach. She asserts:

It must be crushed at once, or not at all. While abolitionists are endeavouring gradually to enfeeble and kill it by inches, it will gradually discover the means of reinforcing its strength, and will soon defy all the puny attacks of its assailants.²⁵

Published two years after James Cropper's *Impolicy of Slavery*, Heyrick's pamphlet makes several arguments in common with Cropper's, the Liverpoolian's refusal to separate interest and duty notwithstanding.²⁶ This should not come as any great surprise: Heyrick, who had become a Quaker after her husband's death, had multiple connections with the leading Liverpool abolitionist. She was a correspondent

²³ Examples of gradualist propaganda include Richard Kennedy, *Slave Trade* (1824) and John Jeremie, *Four Essays in Colonial Slavery* (1832), which are discussed in chapter 1, 'Introduction'.

²⁴ William Wilberforce, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 23 Oct 1822, NMGM, D/CR/4/3. This is discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

²⁵ Heyrick, *Immediate not Gradual Abolition*, p. 24.

²⁶ This is discussed in chapter 4, 'The Impolicy of Slavery: James Cropper's and John Gladstone's Public Correspondence, Liverpool, 1823-4'. Cropper had a copy of *Immediate Not Gradual Abolition* in his possession, NMGM, D/CR/13.

of Cropper's and a beneficiary of his largesse in 1828 when he invested his own money on her behalf in the proposed Liverpool to Manchester railway.²⁷

Whilst arguing for abolition based upon 'duty' rather than 'interest', Heyrick recognises the importance of economic concerns and perhaps reflects one of the few areas where women could exercise some economic influence by arguing for a boycott of West Indian produce. This was also a central plank in Cropper's propaganda:

The planter refuses to set his wretched captive at liberty, treats him as a beast of burden, compels his reluctant unremunerated labourer under the lash of the cart whip, why? Because WE furnish the stimulant to all this injustice, rapacity, and cruelty, by PURCHASING ITS PRODUCE Abstinence from one single article of luxury would annihilate West Indian slavery!! But abstinence it cannot be called; we need only substitute East India, for West India sugar, and the British atmosphere would be purified at once from the poisonous infection of slavery.²⁸

Throughout the pamphlet, Heyrick employs strong language and makes equally strong demands. Echoing the sentiments that the long standing abolitionist, Bishop Samuel Horsley expressed in *Questions to professing Christians*, Heyrick leaves her reader in no doubt about the lack of centre ground within the debate and what she considers the correct Christian position on the subject. The pamphlet makes a veiled attack on the pro-slavery leanings of sections of the Church of England, the kind of Tory loyalists who controlled Manchester's local government. It praises the Christian attitudes of Roman Catholics and Nonconformists, who, whatever their economic and social standing, were politically marginalised, and a great many of whom resided in the city:

By [the considerate and compassionate] we may reasonably expect that ... [the anti-slavery cause] will be taken up, with resolution and consistency. By the great body of Catholics too, who attach so much merit to abstinence and self-denial;- and by all the different Protestant professors, (who are at all sincere in their profession) of the one religion of universal compassion, which requires us to "love our neighbour as ourselves", this testimony against slavery may be expect to be borne with scrupulous

²⁷ James Cropper, personal correspondence to Elizabeth Heyrick, 28 Jan 1830, NMGM, D/CR/12/31.

²⁸ Heyrick, *Immediate not Gradual Abolition*, pp.4-5, 31.

and conscientious fidelity ... - the veil of ignorance is rent aside; - the whole nation must now divide itself into the active supporters, and the active opposers of slavery; there is no longer any ground for the neutral party to stand upon.²⁹

The issues that Heyrick addresses in this pamphlet are to be found in much literature of the time and were used to frame significantly different and sometimes mutually exclusive arguments. *Reasons for Substituting East India for West India Sugar*, an anonymous pamphlet of 1826 published in Birmingham illustrates the influence of propaganda from the region. Without specifically acknowledging either work, it refers to *Immediate not Gradual Emancipation* and to James Cropper's *Impolicy of Slavery*, ties the same themes together and makes broadly the same arguments.³⁰ However, the call in *Reasons for Substituting East India for West India Sugar* is for gradual, not immediate emancipation. In addition to criticising the hypocrisy of abolitionist sympathisers, who used West Indian sugar, the author also takes British policy makers to task for concentrating on catching illegal slave traders, whilst continuing to bolster the slave communities in the Caribbean:

Who will listen to her pathetic declamations on the injustice and cruelty of the Slave Trade, whilst she rivets the chains on her own slaves, and subjects them to all the injustice and cruelty which she so eloquently deplores when her own interest is no longer at stake.³¹

This pamphlet also appeals to the followers of *laissez-faire* philosophy, by claiming that individual action would be the most effective way of bringing about change. By stressing the importance of the individual and perhaps providing encouragement to those who feel that the enemies of abolition were too strong to

²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 30-31; Samuel Horsley, *Questions to Professing Christians on the Use of Slave-Grown Sugar, Coffee, &c.* (c. 1827-8), NMGM, D/CR/12/34. Horsley is discussed in chapter 6, 'The Context for Abolitionism in Liverpool's and Manchester's Shared Hinterland'.

³⁰ Anonymous, *Reasons for Substituting East India for West India Sugar. Chiefly Selected From a Recent Publication on the Subject of Emancipation* (Birmingham, 1826).

³¹ *Ibid.* pp.3-6.

overcome, the author calls for its readers to cease using West Indian sugar, arguing that:

Greater victories have been achieved by the combined expression of *individual opinion*, than by fleets and armies; that greater moral revolutions have been accomplished by the combined exertion of *individual* resolution, than were ever effected by acts of Parliament. The Hydra-headed monster of Slavery will never be destroyed by other means than the united expression of *individual opinion*, and the united exertion of *individual resolution*.³²

It appears that pamphleteers across the country were trying to answer all the pro-slavery advocates' arguments at once, and were not above 'borrowing' each other's work, regardless of their relative standpoints. For example, *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* also addresses the question of the relative well being of Caribbean slaves and British labourers. This was an issue much discussed amongst reformers and protagonists on both sides of the slavery debate and would continue to be so even after emancipation in 1834. Unlike other commentators, such as William Cobbett (discussed below), Heyrick makes no comment about the poverty of mill workers. However, she argues that agricultural labourers in England, who were paid even less generously than their industrial counterparts, had a more comfortable existence than the plantation workers.

Anti-slavery activists were frequently accused of supporting protectionism. However, abolitionists turned the argument around and made the same accusations back; *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* attacks the protectionist tactics on the part of the West Indian planters:

The state of slavery in our West Indian Islands, is now become notorious; the secret is out; the injustice and humanity, the veracity also, of the slave owners, is exactly ascertained; the credit due to their assertions, that their slaves are better fed, better clothed, are more comfortable, more happy than our English peasantry, is now universally understood. The tricks and impostures practiced by the colonial assemblies, to hoodwink the people, to humbug the Government, and to bamboozle the saints (as the friends of emancipation are

³² *Ibid.* p.7-8.

scornfully termed) have all been detected; and the cry of the nation has been raised, from one end to the other, against this complicated system of knavery and imposture; of intolerable oppression, of relentless and savage barbarity.³³

Heyrick can certainly be seen to be rather optimistic in claiming that the truth of the relative well being of Caribbean slaves and English labourers was ‘now universally understood’, and that the disingenuous tactics of the West Indian interest had ‘all been detected’. The abolitionists had seized upon this notion, however, and in 1824, Thomas Clarkson published a pamphlet, in which he answered the accusation that the Caribbean slaves’ lot was better than the English peasants’.³⁴ William Wilberforce also contributed to this debate and had published a pamphlet in the previous year, which argued:

The West Indians, in the warmth of their argument ... have distinctly told us, again and again, and I am shocked to say that some of their partizans in this country have re-echoed the assertion, that these poor degraded beings, the Negro slaves, are as well or even better off than our British peasantry, - a proposition so monstrous, that nothing can possibly exhibit in a stronger light the extreme force of the prejudices which must exist in the minds of its asserters³⁵

It is interesting that Lancashire mill workers were not used for this comparison. As stated above, agricultural workers were probably a more appropriate group for the purpose in terms of the type of work that they each carried out. However, the anti-slavery cause in Manchester looked as much to the industrial working class for support, as it did to the middle-class manufacturers and merchants. Any belittling of the plight of the working class, as Wilberforce was perhaps at times wont to do, would be unlikely to receive a positive reception.

The principled nature of political stances adopted locally is further illustrated by the existence of the Manchester Union and Emancipation Society during the

³³ Anonymous, *Immediate not Gradual Abolition*, p. 5.

³⁴ Thomas Clarkson, *The argument 'That the Colonial Slaves Are Better off than the British Peasantry' Answered* (London, 1824).

³⁵ William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Honour of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London, 1823), p. 45.

American Civil War and more generally in the form of the Manchester Anti-Slavery Union, which remained active during much of the nineteenth century. Lancashire mill workers showed solidarity with the slave-free North during the war. This was despite the fact that the shortage of raw materials (slave-grown cotton from the southern states) as a consequence of the war forced the closure of most of the mills, which led to the Lancashire 'Cotton famine' and a great deal of hardship in the cotton manufacturing areas of the county.

This solidarity was not replicated in Liverpool. Ships were built on Merseyside specifically to break through the blockaded southern ports, operated and crewed in large part by Liverpool men. Many interested parties in the city had declared their support for the Confederate states. However, the hub of the Lancashire cotton industry was Manchester, not Liverpool, and Manchester appears to have been fairly solidly behind the Union. A statue of Abraham Lincoln stands in Brazenose Street in the city, the inscription of which takes the form of a letter from Lincoln, thanking the Lancashire workers for their support during the war. This statue symbolises the fact that wider issues of liberty can be seen to be still very important to significant numbers of the working classes in the region, even in the face of widespread, extreme hardship and suffering.³⁶ Despite some protection of interests amongst middle-class activists and a good deal of 'free trading' in slave-grown goods from around the globe by a significant number of the city's merchants, it seems in the light of the above that activists in the area were largely more principled and significantly less cynical than Williams argues.

The Mancunian abolitionists' zeal can be seen as a part of the radical and reformist tradition of the city, which saw working-class organisations working

³⁶ C. Aspin, 'Cotton's Legacy' in M.B. Rose (ed.), *The Lancashire Cotton Industry, A History since 1700* (Preston, 1996), p. 341.

alongside the more common middle-class reform groups. Indeed, Eric Hobsbawm describes the city as ‘new and revolutionary’. Asa Briggs, though recognising a ‘residual conservatism’ which made the city a centre of loyalism and patriotism, remarks upon social conditions in Manchester, and refers to the dangers of an economy which was ‘developing on the basis of obvious conflicts of interest’.³⁷ Class tensions in the Manchester area, during its early phases of industrialisation and growth and prior to parliamentary reform, seem in large part to have manifested themselves in disputes and struggles between the rising industrial middle class and their working-class employees on the one side, and the local merchant and aristocratic, established political élite on the other. In addition to the slavery question, such struggles were largely based around reform issues such as suffrage and representation, taxation and political liberty, with appeals for free trade and an end to protectionist taxes featuring strongly.

Discussing the anti-slavery petitioning of Parliament, a correspondent in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1792 provides evidence of the nature of these class tensions. He argues:

A petition from Manchester, or such places, or from a county at large, may be supposed to be formed by gentlemen who are competent to judge; but are men, who never read more than the provincial paper, and whose *summum bonum* is getting drunk at an ale house, are they fit people to decide on the existence of our Western possessions?³⁸

This outburst is an illustration of the forces represented by those opposed to reform in the area. It also displays the ignorance in some quarters of Manchester’s growing importance to Britain’s economy; these were indeed largely the people who decided on the existence of British West Indian possessions. Defenders of the ‘old order’ were not going to be easily persuaded or defeated, and the same assumptions as

³⁷ Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p. 56; A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London, 1968), pp. 88-92.

³⁸ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, LXII, 1792, cited in J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and Anti-Slavery* (London, 1998), p. 113.

those above can be detected in relations between protagonists on either side of broader reform debates in the city. For instance, late eighteenth-century radicals and reformers in the city disparagingly referred to their local conservative political opponents as ‘aristocrats’, even though they were largely fellow members of the merchant middle class.³⁹ Manchester abolitionists and reformers faced opposition that was at least as forthright, not to mention violent, as that faced by Liverpoolian activists, yet they continued to gather popular support in the city through the early years of the campaign against the trade. The number of signatories in Manchester to petitions against the trade grew from 10,000 in 1787 to 20,000 in 1792. By this time, the Manchester Committee was meeting on a weekly basis and was sending sizeable sums of money to the London Committee, although the central figures in the reforming campaigns of the city were by this time already marked men and were about to pay the price for their disloyalty.⁴⁰

These forthright abolitionists in Manchester began to drive the provincial campaign, providing the ideal model for other provincial committees to emulate. To some extent they drove the national campaign too, prompting, pre-empting, or eclipsing the London Committee’s efforts. The first anti-slave trade petitioning campaign came about through Manchester reformers, having seen the success of earlier petitioning campaigns, suggesting such a course of action to Thomas Clarkson in May 1788.⁴¹ Seymour Drescher asserts that ‘Manchester converted a London Committee that was little more than a low key lobby ... handing out pamphlets to M.P.s at the doors of Parliament, into the prototype of the modern social reform

³⁹ F. Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker; Ten years in the Life of a Manchester Radical* (London 1957), pp. 119, 142-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 73. *Manchester Herald*, 23 April 1792; H. T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the people in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1994), p. 90.

⁴¹ This is discussed below. See note 58.

movement'.⁴² This may be overstating the case, and the city's importance is often exaggerated by historians who underestimate the London Committee's role in centralising and coordinating campaigns. However, it is clear that during the early years of the campaign against the slave trade, Manchester's abolitionists enjoyed a good deal of prominence in anti-slavery circles. Activists from the city also made significant contributions to the debates in and coffers of the London Committee.⁴³

It seems reasonable for Drescher and E.M. Hunt to ascribe Manchester's prominence to four key factors. These factors were: the high local concentration of Unitarians and other religious Dissenters; a well-established radical tradition amongst the city's populace; the large proportion of merchants on the Manchester Anti-Slavery Society committee; and the city's position as the hub of a rapidly growing industrial region.⁴⁴ If we consider organised anti-slavery in Manchester in the light of the above, it might help identify the reasons for the campaign's local success in canvassing support, compared to the relatively low subscription rates experienced in Liverpool. Further, viewing formal anti-slavery in the city as part of a local tradition of radical and reformist activity concerned with a range of social, political and economic issues provides us with evidence of the forces motivating influential activists and driving organised abolition. It is important to view abolitionist activity in Manchester in this broader reform context. As David Turley asserts, formal anti-slavery in the city constituted just 'one element of an impressive culture of reform'.⁴⁵

⁴² S. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 1988), p. 67.

⁴³ Oldfield, *Popular Politics and Anti-Slavery*, pp. 46-9, 104; J. Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783-1807* (London, 1997), p. 43; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 73, 142-3; M.T. Davies, 'Walker, Thomas', in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography From the earliest Times to the year 2000*, 56 (Oxford 2004), pp.8, 97.

⁴⁴ E.M. Hunt, 'The Anti-Slavery Trade Agitation in Manchester', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 79 (1977), pp. 46-72; Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, pp. 67-73.

⁴⁵ D. Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London, 1991), p. 118.

The paradoxical juxtaposition of Manchester's modern economic base, with its inadequate, outdated political administration and lack of national political representation, is an important issue for consideration. In addition to helping create the conditions that led to the city's disorderly reputation and class-riven society, it provides an illuminating backdrop, against which we may consider the wider question of why Britain abandoned the slave trade and the institution of slavery when she did. The broad range of reformist activity in Manchester, a relatively newly established, modern industrial city, with its outmoded medieval administration, provides further evidence that abolitionists achieved success, at least in part through an ideological appeal to the emerging prosperous, but still disenfranchised, industrial middle class.

This notion is supported by Herbert Klein, who asserts that the campaign against the trade in slaves was based on a belief that free labour was 'one of the crucial underpinnings of modern society', which would appeal 'not only to not only those wedded to free trade and *laissez-faire*, but also to workers being integrated into the urban and increasingly industrial world of nineteenth-century England'.⁴⁶ As Manchester's economic base became increasingly industrial and modern, its antiquated administration became increasingly inefficient and disconnected from the social and economic realities in the city. It was reliant upon a core of agricultural and mercantile élite. These were largely Anglican Tories, loyal to 'Church and King', beneficiaries as well as controllers of the region's political administration. In addition to the enmity felt towards the political élite by the workers of Manchester, the area's more progressive middle classes were opponents to, and often victims of, the local political élite's administration, as the 'Church and King' disturbance in the 1790s

⁴⁶ H. S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 185.

attest.⁴⁷ Given their respective situations, it is hardly surprising that manufacturers and operatives in Manchester would be attracted by potentially radical alternative systems. In addition to their involvement in the anti-slavery cause, we can see that middle-class Dissenting reformers in Manchester and elsewhere concentrated their efforts on addressing issues of political representation, religious freedom and civil liberty. They tied all these issues ‘dogmatically’ to the philosophy of *laissez-faire*.⁴⁸ Many of the manufacturers felt that the economic freedoms associated with *laissez-faire* economics would enable their businesses to thrive and their employees to enjoy relative prosperity.

Whilst the issues of free trade and free labour can perhaps be seen as two sides of the same coin in the 1820s, Mancunian abolitionists in the campaign against the slave trade did not necessarily tie the slavery question to the notion of free trade. Although the anti-slavery movement in the city did consist in part of free-trade advocates, who were for the most part Nonconformists, the local abolitionist leadership was in the hands of ‘Manchester’s most consistent anti-free trader of the 1780s’, the Anglican Thomas Walker.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, there was a discernable ideological connection between the issues of free trade and free labour. A campaign that made direct appeals to the beneficiaries and proponents of free trade would be likely to be well received by the increasingly powerful industrial middle class and also to their employees, whose economic well being was in large part tied to that of their masters. Such appeals attracted a great many active supporters, from across the class spectrum in Manchester, and anti-slavery became part of a broader set of keenly fought reform activities.

⁴⁷ This is discussed below.

⁴⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), p. 57.

⁴⁹ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 69; Drescher, *Econocide; British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburg, 1977), pp. 58-60; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 28-9.

The high number of signatories to Manchester anti-slavery petitions represented a continuation of an established tactic of reformers in the city. The effectiveness of this tactic and the importance of free trade and non-intervention to many of the local populace are illustrated by other petitioning campaigns. However, in spite of its popular support, the anti-slavery cause in Manchester was not the chief concern of the populace. Whilst the 1792 petition against the slave trade managed to attract 20,000 signatures in the city, a petition of 1785, drawn up by Manchester cotton masters against the proposed Fustian Tax (one of over sixty such petitions on the subject sent to Parliament that year) was reputed to have been signed by 80,000 people.⁵⁰ This would seem to suggest that issues with more direct consequences aroused the populace to a greater extent than did broader issues of liberty. In this instance, petitioning appeared to be a successful form of political lobbying and the government abandoned its plans.

Given that Manchester abolitionists were at least as vociferously active in other areas of reform and attracted hostility and censure from national as well regional opponents, their success in mobilising mass support is remarkable. This reinforces the importance of considering abolitionist activity and success in Manchester as part of the city's broader movement for reform, and in the context of its lack of political representation as its importance to the national economy increased. In the early campaigns, anti-slavery activity, alongside other reformist and radical agitation, helps to illustrate the plurality of views held by the abolitionists generally and the moderate nature of much of the abolitionist leadership's stance. This plurality of views can be seen in the positions abolitionists took on slavery and areas of reform closer to home, such as protectionist taxation and trading conditions and working conditions in the

⁵⁰ Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, p. 74; Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 69.

relatively new mills and factories. Further, the leading lights of the anti-slavery and reform movements in Manchester had several bones of contention with locally based conservatives and with leading government figures, including Prime Minister Pitt, an abolitionist of the same ilk as Wilberforce.

The thorny relations between Mancunian reformers and the established order are illustrated by the Anglican Whig radical, Thomas Walker. Walker was, in partnership with his brother, Richard, a successful cotton manufacturer. He possessed business premises and a home in South Parade close to the city centre and a large house in the country, which he rented from Samuel Egerton, a Cheshire aristocrat and member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme.⁵¹ Although he had connections with local élite and, for a short time, held the post of borough reeve, Walker also had impressive reforming credentials. He was a friend and correspondent of Thomas Paine, was a member of several political and philosophical societies and was chairman of the Manchester Anti-Slavery Committee from 1787. In October 1790, the same month as he became borough reeve, Walker helped to organise the Manchester Constitutional Society and became its president. This society called for moderate parliamentary reform and equality for Dissenters. He was involved in both the Manchester and London Revolution Societies. Here we can see significant differences in the outlook of Liverpoolian and Mancunian reformers. Whereas the Roscoe circle tried to avoid being associated with the French Revolution, Walker very publicly celebrated it, at some considerable threat to his own safety and earning himself the sobriquet, 'Jacobin Walker'.⁵²

In July 1791, Walker attended a dinner in Manchester, organised by the Constitutional Society, to celebrate the anniversary of the French Revolution. On the

⁵¹ Lewis's *Directory of Manchester for 1788*; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, p.16.

⁵² Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 16-7, 59. Members of the Roscoe circle are discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

morning before the dinner, a handbill was distributed through Manchester, urging loyal Englishmen to attack the assembly. In Birmingham, a similar celebratory dinner was attacked and a riot ensued, during which several Dissenters' houses were assaulted. Amongst the victims was Walker's friend, Joseph Priestly, whose house was burned down, destroying his library, laboratory and papers. Walker had joined the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in January 1790, but resigned from it at the end of 1791, because the Society had refused to offer its sympathies to Priestly for his losses following the disturbances in Birmingham.⁵³

Walker, along with many other Manchester cotton merchants, was at odds with Pitt's government over the proposed Fustian Tax and was involved in organising the petitioning campaign against it. Walker further displayed his protectionist credentials and came into conflict with the government in the same year as he helped defeat Pitt's proposed Fustian Tax. He founded the General Chamber of Manufacturers in 1785, specifically to combat Pitt's proposals to form a custom union with Ireland. Walker feared the damage to his profits that free trade would cause, but his success with the Fustian Tax was not repeated and the government's proposals went ahead.⁵⁴

Pitt's government attempted to meet the expense of the war with France, against which reformers in Manchester had vigorously campaigned, by levying punitive taxes. These taxes had a disastrous effect on both manufacturers and labourers in Manchester. The various reform societies that had supported the French Revolution and campaigned against the war, stepped up their campaign and agitated

⁵³ R.E. Schofield, 'Priestly, Joseph', in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 44, p. 357; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 59-61. Priestly is discussed in chapter 6, 'The Context for Abolitionism in Liverpool's and Manchester's Shared Hinterland'.

⁵⁴ Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 26-34; Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, pp. 68-9; Davies, 'Walker, Thomas' in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 56, p.897.

for peace and the repeal of the new taxes. The campaign was conducted through pamphlets, public meetings and the pages of *The Manchester Herald*. At the behest of the authorities in London and acting upon some very spurious information gleaned from spies, the local constabulary and Church and King Club ‘mob’ violently opposed the reformers. Agents of the government also prevented those Manchester merchants involved in the agitation from collecting monies due to them abroad. This was to have disastrous consequences for campaigners in Manchester and elsewhere. In the aftermath of the ‘Church and King’ riots in 1792, several reformist leaders were jailed, including Benjamin Booth. Others, such as Thomas Walker, lost their businesses and livelihoods. Prevented from collecting monies owed to him abroad, Walker’s firm finally went out of business in 1799. Thomas Cooper and Joseph Priestly, who had both made considerable contributions to the anti-slavery and other reform causes across the region and further afield, emigrated to America. To complete the gloomy picture for Manchester radicalism, the city’s progressive newspaper, *The Manchester Herald*, was forced to close. Accompanying a nationwide lull in abolitionist activity, there followed an inevitable decline of the local committee’s standing and vitality following the defeat of the anti-slave trade Bill in the Lords and Thomas Walker’s trial for treason in 1792.⁵⁵

Although Walker had campaigned for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and an end to the oppression and intimidation of religious Dissenters, he was critical of Dissenters as a political body. Perhaps the most significant of these differences regarding approaches to abolition centred on free trade. While Nonconformists were largely supporters of it, Walker clearly was not. However, it appears that it was a lack of willingness on the Dissenters’ part to commit to the cause

⁵⁵ Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 153-165; Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, p. 185; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 130; Davies, ‘Walker, Thomas’ in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 56, p.897.

of liberty (including their own) that frustrated Walker. In 1794, soon after his trials for treason and ‘damning the King’, he bitterly argued that Dissenters had ‘consistently fallen short of their own principles’. Perhaps he held them partly to blame for his own downfall. After all, one of his chief Dissenting allies, the Bolton Unitarian, Thomas Cooper, had appeared to give up the fight by emigrating to America in 1794. Walker continues:

There is little or no dependence to be placed upon those who zealously mix religious with political questions, or *who only from sectarian motives join in political societies* ... Through fear or some other motive *they have been so strongly the advocates of Overstrained Moderation that they have rather been the enemies than the friends of those who have ventured ... and effected the most for the rights of the people...* Neither the Birmingham riots, nor the Manchester riots, nor the prosecutions ... which have taken place, would have happened, had not the timidity and want of union amongst the friends of freedom emboldened their enemies.⁵⁶

Walker’s radical reputation is attested by events fourteen years after his death. His son Charles followed in his father’s footsteps to some extent, becoming a town councillor in Manchester and a local magistrate. He argued strongly for the reform of Parliament. After speaking at a public meeting held to support this campaign in 1831, calling on the House of Lords to pass the reform Bill, he was followed by Richard Potter. *The Times* reported:

[Potter] with the greatest energy, exclaimed: ‘This is the son of the late venerable Thomas Walker, the great patriot, who was mobbed in his house and tried ... for being an advocate of that reform which is now sanctioned by the King and his ministers. (Tremendous applause.) I rejoice to see the day when his principles are cherished by a whole people. I especially rejoice to see the son thus nobly advocating the cause in which the father suffered so much’. The applause which followed ... was deafening.⁵⁷

When the Manchester Anti-Slave Trade Committee was established in December 1787, its thirty-one members included Thomas Walker’s friend, the radical

⁵⁶ Thomas Walker, *Review of Some Political Events in Manchester* (1794), p.125; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 172-4, 176-7; S.L. Newman, ‘Cooper, Thomas’ in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 13, p. 281.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 24 Sep 1831; M.J. Turner, *Reform and Respectability; The Making of a Middle-Class Liberalism In Early 19th-Century Manchester* (Manchester, 1995), p. 44.

Thomas Cooper. It was these two men who represented the Manchester Committee on the London Committee and Cooper who was largely behind the organisation of the Manchester petition against the slave trade.⁵⁸ Earlier in the year, in his *Letters on the African Slave Trade*, Cooper described slavery as ‘the most diabolical exertion of political tyranny’.⁵⁹ Cooper was an outspoken and very active radical. He was vice-president of Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and a founder member of the Manchester Constitutional Society. It was in these societies that Cooper encountered and befriended Thomas Walker.⁶⁰ Unlike the majority of abolitionists, Cooper was not an advocate of capitalism. In 1794, he argued that:

This system [must] have a large portion of the people converted into mere machines, ignorant, debauched, and brutal, that the surplus value of their labour of 12 or 14 hours a day, may go into the pockets and supply the luxuries of rich, commercial, and manufacturing capitalists.⁶¹

Cooper was also an opponent of the unrepresentative British mode of government. A supporter of revolutionary France, he visited the country in 1792 with James Watt, where they met with leaders of the revolutionary government as representatives of the Manchester Constitutional Society. He was criticised for this in Parliament by Edmund Burke, who opposed the French Revolution. In his reply to Burke, Cooper echoing Thomas Paine, reinforced his radical reputation and outlined his opposition to hereditary governance, arguing that ‘Kings and Nobles have flourished at the expense of the people, who have been universally regarded merely as the footstools of their pride, and the means of their gratification’. He continues by advocating fully inclusive democracy, ‘If the good of the people is to be the object of

⁵⁸ Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, p.119; Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the Slave Trade*, pp. 40, 45; Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, pp. 47-8, 96.

⁵⁹ Thomas Cooper, *Letters on the African Slave Trade* (Manchester, 1787), p. 4.

⁶⁰ Newman, ‘Cooper, Thomas’ in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 13, p. 280.

⁶¹ Thomas Cooper, *Some Information Regarding America* (1794), quoted in Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 379.

Government, THEY MUST BE THEIR OWN GOVERNERS – they must adopt, *in fact*, the government of the MANY by the MANY’.⁶²

Abolitionists and parliamentary reformers from Manchester, Liverpool and from other Lancashire and Cheshire communities held meetings through the latter part of 1789 and early 1790, and Cooper’s radicalism caused a good deal of friction amongst his colleagues at these meetings too. His radical arguments brought together his opposition to the oppression of slaves, discrimination against Dissenters and, unusually for this period, women, to whom he argued that the franchise ought to be extended. He also advocated a national system of liberal education, which would enable the poor to improve their conditions. He believed that without education, ordinary people would be unable to understand the nature of their oppression and that until such a public system was instigated, non élite members of society should set up clubs and societies for this purpose.⁶³ In 1792, Cooper became the first editor of *The Manchester Herald*, which was almost certainly ‘the first provincial newspaper established for purely political reasons’. The success of this publication in agitating support amongst non élite Mancunians is attested by the bitter opposition from local Tories that it attracted. It was this opposition that forced the paper to close in 1793 (discussed above).⁶⁴

Thomas Cooper’s activities after he left the region tell an interesting story. In the fallout of the Church and King riots of 1792 and his ensuing trial for treason, Cooper lost a good deal of faith in the reform cause’s chances of success. Indeed, there was a growing, government-sponsored, anti-radical sentiment fermenting

⁶² Thomas Cooper, *Reply to Mr. Burke’s Invective, Against Mr. Cooper and Mr. Watt in the House of Commons, on the 30th April 1792* (Manchester, 1792), pp. 13, 28.

⁶³ Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, p.160; Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 185, 187.

⁶⁴ Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 38-40; D. Clare, ‘The Local Newspaper Press and Local Politics in Manchester and Liverpool 1780-1800’, *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 73-4 (1963-4), pp. 107, 112.

throughout the country, and the excesses of 1791 did not bring an end to the sufferings of radicals, republicans and advocates of the French Revolution. Religious intolerance was increasing and the calico bleaching company that employed Cooper ceased trading.⁶⁵ In 1794, he left the Manchester area and, along with Joseph Priestly, moved to North America, settling in Pennsylvania to follow a career in academia, and where he established a radical newspaper, the *Republican Weekly Advertiser*. The public expression of his political views continued to place Cooper at odds with those in authority and, in 1800, he served a six month jail sentence and paid a \$400 fine for libelling the President, John Adams. It is interesting to note that Adams, perhaps displaying some sentiment of rapprochement, would later refer to Cooper as ‘that learned, ingenious, scientific and talented madcap’. His incarceration did not deter him, and he remained active in academic and political spheres, making as many influential friends as he did enemies. Perhaps most notable amongst his new friends was Thomas Jefferson, who helped secure a position for Cooper at the University of Virginia.⁶⁶

Ensconced geographically and politically in the southern states, Cooper’s views regarding economics and slavery had changed markedly. Having supported the imposition of high protective duties during the war with Britain between 1812 and 1814, Cooper then argued vociferously for free trade in the 1820s, demanding the removal of trade tariffs, but this was for a protectionist motive. Rather peculiarly, by Mancunian standards at least, the interests he was protecting were those of farmers in

⁶⁵ M.S. Smith, ‘Anti-Radicalism and Popular Politics in an Age of Revolution’, in C. Jones, P. Salmon and R. W. Davis (eds), *Partisan Politics, Principle and Reform in Parliament in the Constituencies, 1689-1880; Essays in Memory of John A. Philips* (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 71-92; C. Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain 1758-1834* (London, 1995), p.227.

⁶⁶ Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, p. 177; D. Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-slavery, 1780-1860* (London, 1991), p. 170.

Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*; Newman, ‘Cooper, Thomas’ in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 13, pp. 280-1.

the southern states against those of manufacturers in the North. The high levels of duty on imported goods had been imposed to help the growing industries in the North. They worked to the advantage of the northern industrial states to the disadvantage of those in the South, whose economies were in large part reliant on agricultural exports to Britain. This particular issue was remedied by a compromise on the part of the Federal government, but Cooper's displeasure at the North's dominance over the South continued. In 1834, he argued that the southern states should secede from the union, in order to protect their interests. Strangely for a man who once asserted slavery to be 'the most diabolical exertion of political tyranny which the annals of oppression can exhibit', and whose overt radical stance led Liverpoolian abolitionist, James Currie, to worry about the reform and abolitionist causes creating more enemies rather than attracting more supporters, Cooper's opposition to slavery had dissolved completely. The southern interests he sought to protect from northern dominance and oppression included retaining the slave system, which Cooper now argued was not only necessary, but also just.⁶⁷ Clearly, his vision of democratic government 'for the many by the many' was no longer so inclusive.⁶⁸ It seems that Cooper's radical political activities were not the result of a commitment to liberty so much as an opposition to authority.

Opposition to slavery in Manchester can be seen to have a more politically radical base than Liverpool's. Activity in Manchester was somewhat weakened after the Church and King riots and the anti-radical backlash that followed them. Loyalist agitators and activists, by dint of force and with significant popular support, had been victorious in the 1790s, and the national government was keen to avert and to quell

⁶⁷ Thomas Cooper, *Letters on the African Slave Trade* (Manchester, 1787), p.4; Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-slavery*, p.160; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, pp. 176-7; Newman, 'Cooper, Thomas' in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 13, p. 281.

⁶⁸ Cooper, *Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective, Against Mr. Cooper and Mr. Watt*, p.28.

any further activity by radical reformers.⁶⁹ Despite these major setbacks, radical and reform movements in the area soon began to operate again, if not exactly thrive. As the anti-slavery campaign gathered new momentum in the early 1800s, the cause in Manchester continued to receive popular support, and Manchester abolitionists carried on contributing to the national campaign. However, from the early 1820s, the leading centre for anti-slavery in the region was now Liverpool.⁷⁰ That this local support continued to grow and Manchester activists continued to be effective is at least in part due to the fact that anti-slavery arguments and campaigns encompassed a broad range of political views, from moderate reformers to more outspoken radicals. On the broader national stage, this ‘ambivalence of abolition’ led to the formation of an informal alliance between reformist middle class and radical democratic activists who was able to garner a great deal of popular support. Commenting on this adaptability and potential for success, Robin Blackburn argues that ‘the anti-slavery critique could respond to the need to develop new norms of social reproduction and cohesion’.⁷¹ In Manchester, this cross-class alliance was more marked than was generally the case elsewhere. Activists in the city were from both working and middle-class backgrounds, and their perceived common enemy (in view of the dire economic constraints placed on both manufacturers and labourers, we might say ‘real enemy’), at least until the reform of Parliament on the eve of emancipation, were the same anti-reform, pro-war, pro-monopoly, pro-slavery forces.⁷²

The local Anglican, Tory oligarchy in Manchester exercised their power in increasingly harsh and partisan ways from the late eighteenth century. From 1812, and

⁶⁹ Smith, ‘Anti-Radicalism and Popular Politics in an Age of Revolution’, in Jones *et al*, *Partisan Politics, Principle and Reform in Parliament in the Constituencies*, pp. 71-92.

⁷⁰ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, pp. 90, 93.

⁷¹ R. Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London, 1988), p. 295.

⁷² Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp.82, 121-3; Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker* pp. 91-111.

especially after the Peterloo massacre in 1819, there existed a group of Nonconformist liberals in the city, which tried to break the oligarchy's control on all local affairs. This informal group included activists such as Joseph Brotherton, William Cowdroy, John, Richard and Thomas Potter, Archibald Prentice, John Shuttleworth, John Edward Taylor and Absalom Watkin. Abolitionism in the city remained a part of its broad ranging reform culture, but under this leadership it was considerably more moderate than had been the case in the period up to 1791. Whilst these moderate reformers continued to campaign, their alliance with more forthright activists in the pursuits of slave abolition and religious equality was over. They maintained a distance between themselves and the positions held by their erstwhile radical allies.⁷³

Evidence discussed elsewhere in this thesis suggests that the success achieved by the abolition campaigns came about in part because arguments were framed not just to appeal to humanitarian sentiments, but also to the perceived economic self-interest of the increasingly powerful industrial middle class. Anti-slavery material published in Manchester provides further evidence of campaigners making direct appeals to what was to become the new orthodox ideology, as well as to genuine humanitarian ideas of liberty. In the same year as Cropper published *Impolicy of Slavery*, a pamphlet making similar arguments was published in Manchester. *Trade to the East Indies* argues for a lifting of restrictions on trade to the East Indies, making the same argument that Cropper does: that freeing trade to the east would enable more exports to the region, and that importing free-grown sugar and cotton from the East Indies would be of commercial benefit. The author appeals to his readership's economic patriotism, asserting that 'manufacturers of other countries are treading closely upon our heels' and that 'France now manufactures about as much cotton as

⁷³ Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 170; M. Goffin (ed.), *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin, A Manchester Man 1787 – 1861* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 91-107; Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 255-78.

we did only 14 years ago'. In the same vein, the author bemoans the fact that 'we lay the same duty on cotton *from our own dominions* in India, as on American Cotton, while America imposes from 25 to 100 per cent on our manufactures'. To illustrate the unfair levels of duty, the pamphlet compares duties on East and West Indian produce:

East Indies sugar, £370 per ton, West Indies, £27 per ton.
East Indies coffee, £84 per ton, West Indies, £56 per ton.
East Indies cocoa, £84 per ton, West Indies, £56 per ton.
East Indies turmeric, £10 per ton, West Indies, £3 per ton.
East Indies rum, £1 per gallon, West Indies, 8s. 6d per gallon.
East Indies cotton wool, £6 per cent ad valorem, West Indies, no duty.⁷⁴

To emphasise this point the author argues that it cost nothing to maintain and defend Indian colonies, but maintenance of the Caribbean slave colonies was prohibitively expensive:

The expense of our Slave Colonies during the year 1824, a year of profound peace, for naval and military defence, and other contingencies, amounted to upwards of One Million Six Hundred Thousand Pounds, and this is an expense which is going on from year to year; while, *on the contrary* **INDIA MAINTAINS HERSELF** – *her defence and government cost us nothing. – The expense of every establishment connected with her, at home or abroad, is defrayed from her own resources.*⁷⁵

Economic and political conditions in Manchester combined to create a context for reform activism. Prior to the 1832 Reform of Parliament Act (which enfranchised the majority of middle-class males and removed rotten boroughs), disaffection with taxes, price controls and restrictive legislation imposed by the government was widespread amongst both manufacturers and operatives in Manchester. Industrial workers and their middle-class masters would suffer together in times of economic strife (albeit with very different degrees of hardship), and they were similarly frustrated by a total lack of influence over policies that directly and adversely affected

⁷⁴ Anonymous, *Trade to the East Indies* (Manchester, 1826).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

them, to the benefit of the current political élite. After the reform of Parliament, class divisions and tensions formed along different lines, and the solidarity between the middle and working classes was greatly weakened. It was still evident but to a lesser extent and around specific issues such as the anti-Corn Law campaigns. This is evinced by Robert Hyde Greg, a cotton mill owner from Styal, nine miles to the south of Manchester, who actively campaigned against the Corn Laws and for a limited extension of the Parliamentary franchise, but was unsurprisingly opposed to measures which would improve conditions or reduce working hours for mill workers or extend the franchise to them.⁷⁶ In common with the slavery question, the debate about the Corn Laws could easily be seen as another area where the interests of the old order (in the guise of the politically well represented, wheat-growing land owners) whom the Corn Laws protected, and those of the newly powerful industrialists, were in conflict. Once again, the motivation for middle-class reformers was at least partly ideological: an adherence to the principles of free trade. Where they showed apparent solidarity with their working-class counterparts, they did so out of a sense of protecting or furthering their own economic strength. The wider interests of the working classes, such as income levels and welfare, were not by and large an issue.⁷⁷ We might also add that higher prices for bread would lead to further demands for increased wages. The cross-class unity amongst reformers did prevail with a fair level of constancy throughout the period of organised anti-slavery. This was at least in part due to the peculiarities of Manchester's local political administration and the people who controlled it.

⁷⁶ Goffin, *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin*, pp. 136, 210, 221; M.B. Rose, *The Gregs of Styal* (London, 1978), pp. 33-6; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 253, 348; Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, p. 315. The Greg family is discussed in chapter 6, 'The Context of Abolitionism in Liverpool's and Manchester's Shared Hinterland'.

⁷⁷ Goffin, *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin*, pp. 20-21, 114; Vigier, *Change and Apathy*, pp. 26, 215-6.

The violent disturbances of 24 May 1808 at St. George's Fields in Manchester and more famously those of 16 August 1819 at St. Peter's Fields in the city (the Peterloo Massacre), illustrate the level of active, organised support in the area for reform issues. Additionally, they demonstrate the relative, if perhaps short-lived, solidarity between middle-class and working-class reformers and activists in the region on a broad range of issues. They also show the importance of Manchester as the hub of not only a growing industrial region, but also an increasingly politically active and agitated one.⁷⁸ Anti-slavery formed a significant part of this reform activism, as James Walvin asserts, 'Not all reformers were abolitionists, and not all abolitionists were reformers. Nonetheless, enough of them shared a common political ground ... to suggest that abolition was able to appeal to men of a reforming sensibility'.⁷⁹ This notion is further illustrated by the voting patterns of members of Parliament, who supported abolitionist bills. In large part, these members also tended to vote for reformist motions, though Wilberforce was a notable exception.⁸⁰ In Manchester, this national picture is replicated, with several leading reformers and radicals cutting their activist teeth in the campaign against the slave trade.

The tying together of diverse reform issues is illustrated by the parody of Wedgwood's 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?' motif, the seal of the Anti-Slavery Society which was also used to commemorate the Peterloo Massacre. Designed by George Cruikshank as a mock medal for the front cover of the satirical publication, *A Slap at Slop*, both the graphics and wording of the motif are modified. Cruikshank shows a supplicant weaver about to be killed by a soldier, who is portrayed as a

⁷⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 749-756; Read, *Peterloo*, pp. 2-4, 94-5.

⁷⁹ J. Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776 - 1838* (Basingstoke, 1986), p. 109.

⁸⁰ G.M. Ditchfield, 'Repeal, Abolition, and Reform: A Study in the Interaction of Reforming Movements in the Parliament of 1790-6', in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), pp. 103-4.

caricatured African. The wording reads, 'Am I not a man and a brother – No! ... You are a poor weaver!'

This mock medal also serves to remind its audience of the position of William Wilberforce, who was in opposition to any efforts to ameliorate the conditions of working-class people in England. Here the inference is obvious: that the plight of the Africans in the New World was at least matched by that of white factory workers and mill operatives at home. Abolitionist politicians such as Wilberforce were accused of hypocrisy in ignoring or dismissing this issue. This was a common charge against some of the moderate abolitionists, and it came from both sides of the slavery debate.

In August 1823, William Cobbett published an open letter to Wilberforce in the *Political Register*. In it, he takes Wilberforce to task for trying to grant slaves the same freedom as British labourers. He accuses Wilberforce of preaching 'a great deal of canting trash; a great deal of lying; a great deal of ... cool impudent falsehood ... a monstrous quantity of hypocrisy'.⁸¹ Cobbett seemed to despise Wilberforce and had referred to the slaves as 'fat lazy niggers' and planters as 'gentle' and 'generous'.⁸² To compound this, in another example of the slavery debate making strange bedfellows, John Gladstone, Chairman of the Liverpool West Indian Association, paid tribute to Cobbett, calling him 'a powerful and intelligent advocate of the planters'.⁸³ Despite this, however, Cobbett was not a pro-slavery advocate as such. He did recognise some validity in abolitionist thinking, telling Wilberforce that what he said about the 'partiality' of laws in the West Indies was 'right enough'. His concern was with the English working class, whose conditions he compares less than favourably with those

⁸¹ William Cobbett, 'To William Wilberforce on the State of the Cotton Factory Labourers, and on the Speech of Andrew Ryding, who Cut Horrocks with a Cleaver', *The Political Register*, Aug 1823, in N. Thompson, and D. Eastwood, (eds), *William Cobbett Political Writing 1820-25* (London, 1998), p. 352.

⁸² Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 155.

⁸³ Pollock, *Wilberforce*, pp. 287-8.

of the slaves. In the *Political Register* of November 1824 he writes, 'It is to be a despicable hypocrite, to pretend to believe that the slaves in the West Indies are not better off than the slaves in these manufacturies'.⁸⁴

The target of the satirical Peterloo mock medal is Wilberforce, and his moderate, anti-reform supporters. It is not aimed at the anti-slavery movement *per se* and it seems fair to take issue with Marcus Wood's rather stark assertion that this is evidence of radical hostility towards slave abolitionism.⁸⁵ Cruikshank's co-collaborator on the publication of *A Slap at Slop* was the radical publisher, William Hone. When Thomas Walker, the Manchester abolitionist and radical reformer, died in 1817, Hone penned an almost gushing appreciation of his political ally, which suggests no antagonism towards the anti-slavery cause:

The remains of Thomas Walker must not be consigned to the tomb without some tribute to his talents, virtues and sufferings... He was a steady and consistent friend both of civil and religious freedom... His love of freedom, his hatred of tyranny were not circumscribed within the narrow limits of his native land... He ardently wished to see [liberty's] blessings all over the world.⁸⁶

In addition to providing evidence of anti-slavery being tied in with broader movements of social reform in Manchester and further afield, this eulogy further underlines the importance of Manchester's anti-slavery leadership in the national arena. It is also interesting to note here that the moderate Wilberforce held the radical Walker in as low esteem as he was himself held by Cobbett.

The views that Cobbett expressed concerning the relative poverty of Lancashire mill workers and West Indian slaves were held by a number of radicals and reformers. They continued to have currency in the Manchester area and across the

⁸⁴ William Cobbett, 'To the Landowners on the Evils of Collecting Manufacturing Into Great Masses', *The Political Register*, Nov 1824, in Thompson, and Eastwood, (eds), *William Cobbett Political Writing*, pp. 430-32.

⁸⁵ M. Wood, *Radical Satire and print Culture, 1790-1832* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 211-14; M. Wood, *Blind memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 171-2.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Knight, *The Strange Case of Thomas Walker*, p. 182.

country and were held by increasing numbers after the abolition of slavery in 1834. Patricia Hollis asserts that anti-slavery aroused hostility amongst the British working class. Those Chartists and anti-Corn Law activists who were not in the abolitionist camp seemingly held the view that black slaves were better off than the white British working class. In 1840, working-class radical Chartists disrupted a public meeting in Norwich called to form a branch of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. There were constant interruptions by the Chartists, who were determined to discuss the New Poor Laws and other issues pertaining to poverty amongst operatives in England.⁸⁷ Radicals also disrupted a meeting held at Manchester Town Hall in May 1838, convened to support the ending of the apprenticeship system and call for full emancipation of slaves in the Caribbean. The radicals were concerned with issues much closer to home in Lancashire, making the case for ‘white-slave weavers and the New Poor Law’. The middle-class reformer and abolitionist, Absalom Watkin, who had met Cobbett himself nine years earlier and had been impressed with his demeanour and sincerity (if not necessarily many of his political views), was not so equable here. He refers to the radicals’ leader, a shopkeeper named James Nightingale, as an, ‘impudent rascal’ keeping the meeting in a ‘state of battle for more than an hour’.⁸⁸ In addition to his humanitarianism, Watkin’s views on slavery seem to be based upon genuine beliefs that free labour was more efficient and profitable than slave labour, and that slaves’ working and living conditions were harsher than those enjoyed by Lancashire mill workers.⁸⁹ These views, along with his status as a wealthy, successful cotton trader and employer of such free labour, would render him a fair target for those activists who were concerned with ameliorating the conditions

⁸⁷ P. Hollis, ‘Anti-Slavery and British Working-Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform’, in Bolt and Drescher, *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform*, pp. 295-311.

⁸⁸ Absalom Watkin, diary entries, 11 Nov 1829; 3 Jan, 1830; 10 Jan, 1830; 26 April 1838 in Goffin, *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin*, pp. 111-2, 196.

⁸⁹ Absalom Watkin, diary entry, 11 Nov 1829, in *Ibid.* p. 111.

of the working class in England, without their necessarily being opposed to the slave emancipation cause as such.

The views of the paternalistic Tory campaigner for the ten hour day, Richard Oastler, whose initial concerns were with protecting factory children, provide an illustration of this type of outlook. As he came into increasing contact with working people, he developed his ideas to protect working-class men and women as well as their children from the excesses of industrial capitalism. Although he was a fierce critic of abolitionists such as Wilberforce, who ignored or dismissed the British workers' poor conditions, Oastler avowed himself to be an emancipationist, but claimed that his first duty was to English children rather than Caribbean plantation workers. He wrote in 1830, 'Slavery I would assist in destroying everywhere; I would not *confine* my sympathies to slaves in the West Indies'.⁹⁰

Abolitionists in Manchester certainly took the lead locally in the initial campaign against the slave trade. However, after the fallout of the Church and King riots in the 1790s and the Peterloo massacre of 1819, and as the campaign for emancipation began to gather momentum in the 1820s, practical and intellectual anti-slavery leadership in the region came from Liverpool. In the light of this, we can see that, philosophically at least, Manchester did not come to dominate the region during our period and it would be erroneous in the extreme to describe Liverpool as effectively a suburb of its neighbour.⁹¹ Throughout the emancipation campaign, local and increasingly national anti-slavery arguments reflected commercial interests as much as they did humanitarian ones. Liverpool's and particularly James Cropper's importance in driving this campaign ought not to be underestimated. However, the arguments emanating from Liverpool seem to be aimed in large part at the rising

⁹⁰ R. Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words* (1833), p. 16, discussed in Hollis, 'Anti-Slavery and British Working-Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform', pp. 295-311.

⁹¹ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 162.

industrial middle class, the new economic élite, and it was Manchester, which played host to the greatest local, if not national, concentration of these people during the period. Liverpudlian abolitionism, as discussed in chapter three of this study, operated in a manner specific to its locality. The campaigns in Manchester can be seen in a similar light. It was local concerns that coloured campaigns and to a large extent motivated activists in the city. Whilst a relationship between abolitionism in Manchester and the growth of industrial capitalism can be clearly discerned, it is not so stark and simple as Williams would have it. Mancunian free traders, protectionists and opponents of capitalism all made contributions to the anti-slavery cause.

Chapter 6.

The context for Abolitionism in Liverpool's and Manchester's Shared Hinterland

For the purposes of this study, the shared hinterland of the two great conurbations of Liverpool and Manchester comprises southern Lancashire, the county of Cheshire and those parts of Flintshire and Denbighshire in North East Wales, which fell under the political, commercial and cultural influence of this part of England. As both Manchester and Liverpool experienced rapid growth in terms of their population and commercial importance, new conurbations in the area sprang up and grew on the back of industrial expansion and traditional regional centres saw their importance decline. Nevertheless, the county towns of Chester and Lancaster along with established centres such as Warrington retained a good deal of their traditional local influence in the region and were also connected to the slave trade and system. Further, the rapidly growing industrial areas of Lancashire, Cheshire and North East Wales were making a considerable contribution to the local, regional and national economy as well as to the commercial success of the port of Liverpool and the manufacturing industry of Manchester. As discussed elsewhere in this study, people, money, and modes of political and economic thinking made the short journey between Liverpool and Manchester. As the communication and transport infrastructure improved and new urban centres developed, these people, their money and ideas were also able to spread through the rest of the region.

The port of Chester had declined in regional importance, inversely to the growth of the port of Liverpool. Liverpool took over from Cheshire's county town as the main regional port during the middle years of the eighteenth century. Chester's efforts to keep up with its neighbour spurred the Liverpool Corporation to improve

their port facilities further, helping to turn the city into a major international port.¹ Chester nevertheless retained a significant amount of its local influence and maintained close links with its larger neighbour, which included taking care of Liverpool's religious governance, at least as far as adherents to the Church of England were concerned. Liverpool did not become a diocese in its own right until 1880 and, until then, the area was part of the Diocese of Chester. The two cities also had potential links through their common interest in the slave trade; the Port of Chester was active in the Africa and West Indies trades. Chester's involvement, however, was a relatively minor and short-lived one. In common with its involvement in other international maritime activities, the city can by no means be seen as a slave trading competitor to Liverpool.

Herbert Hughes asserted that Chester 'never dirtied its hands with slavery'.² However, merchants and investors in Chester were close enough to Liverpool to be aware of the potential profits of slave trading, and already had the trading connections in England and Ireland to provide them with slave goods for the first leg of the triangle and for distribution of imported raw materials. It is clear, then, that the city did indeed 'dirty its hands' with the trade.³ In 1700, the Chester registered *Friendship*, a vessel with displacement of only fifty tons, returned to the city from Jamaica with a cargo of sugar. When the Royal African Company lost its monopoly of the slave trade in 1698, the merchants of Chester recognised the potential opportunity for

¹ M.J. Power, 'The Growth of Liverpool', in J. Belchem (ed.), *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790 – 1940* (Liverpool, 1992), p. 21; F. Vigier, *Change and Apathy, Liverpool and Manchester During the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1970), pp. 36, 46-7; C.B. Phillips and J.H. Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540* (London, 1994), p. 85.

² H. Hughes, *The Chronicles of Chester, The 200 Years, 1775-1975* (London, 1975), p. 144. Hughes was writing as the former editor of *The Chester Chronicle*.

³ R. Craig, 'Shipping and Shipbuilding in the Port of Chester in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 116 (1964), pp. 39-51; M. M. Schofield, 'The Slave Trade from Lancashire and Cheshire Ports Outside Liverpool c.1750 - c.1790', in R. Anstey and P. E. H. Hair (eds) *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition* (Liverpool, 1989), pp. 239-252.

involvement in the trade and rather optimistically envisioned a return to prominence of their port. In 1709, they petitioned Parliament seeking some official recognition and support, stating that Chester ‘was and is a Place of Considerable Trade, and situated commodiously for the Export of Welch Flannels and other Manufactures proper for the Trade to Africa’.⁴ However, it was not Welsh flannels, but East Indian and increasingly Manchester fabrics that were used for payment in Africa, and Chester was in no position to export these goods in any significant quantities. It would be another forty-one years before the city’s proper involvement in the triangular trade, such as it was. Between 1750 and 1754, three ships made a total of six slave trading ventures from the city, and two vessels between them made three slaving voyages between 1773 and 1775.⁵

Chester’s proximity to Liverpool and its continuing though diminished role as a West coast port and regional centre engendered commercial links between the two cities. Chester maintained an indirect link to the slave trade through this proximity. In common with their counterparts throughout the region, those Cestrian merchants wishing to invest directly in the slave trade tended to do so in Liverpool, where, due to its status as the centre of the African trade, the largest number and most profitable opportunities were to be found. This would suggest that the debate about slavery might not be as intense in Chester, as connections with slavery and the slave trade were not so direct or intimate. When he visited the city in 1787, Thomas Clarkson found that Cestrians varied in the depth of their understanding of the slave trade. Commenting on a local journalist (Mr Cowdray), with whom he had discussed the subject, Clarkson wrote:

⁴ *Journal of the House of Commons*, XVI, 19 Feb 1709; N. Tattersfield *The Forgotten Trade, Comprising the Log of The Daniel and Henry and Accounts of the Slave Trade from the Minor Ports of England, 1698-1725* (London, 1991), pp. 324-5.

⁵ Schofield, ‘The Slave Trade from Lancashire and Cheshire Ports Outside Liverpool’, pp. 239, 244, 249-52.

Living at so short a distance from Liverpool, and in a county from which so many persons were constantly going to Africa, he was by no means ignorant, as some were, of the nature of this cruel traffic.⁶

By the later campaign for emancipation in the 1820s, the subject of slavery was one which still had a mixed impact on the local population. In 1823, the city did send a petition as part of a national petitioning campaign for emancipation, which would suggest that there was a fair degree of local anti-slavery sentiment. However, the fact that the city did not host an organised society, suggests that perhaps there was not a great degree of local commitment to the cause.⁷

In addition to the city's connections to Liverpool, Chester also had extensive links with Manchester. Many of the new mill towns and the relatively affluent suburbs to the south and east of Manchester fell within Cheshire's boundaries. Whilst towns such as Altrincham, Stockport, Stalybridge and Hyde, and isolated outposts such as Styal were to all intents in Manchester's social and commercial orbit, with strong economic, cultural and political ties, their location in Cheshire meant that their local governance was centred in Chester, and the county town retained some degree of influence in the area. Further, until the creation of the Diocese of Manchester in 1847, the area, like Liverpool, came under the religious jurisdiction of the Bishop of Chester. The Church of England had considerable political importance and influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, locally, regionally and nationally. As discussed earlier, there were several Anglican clergymen in the region who made significant contributions in many social and political areas, not least of which was the

⁶ Thomas Clarkson, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade*, vol. i (1808), p. 370, cited in Schofield, 'The Slave Trade from Lancashire and Cheshire Ports Outside Liverpool', pp. 251-52.

⁷ Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions, *Substance of the Debate in the House of Commons, on the 15th May, 1823, On a Motion for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions with a Preface and Appendixes Containing Facts and Reasonings Illustrative of Colonial Bondage* (London, 1823, reprinted 1968), p. xxxviii. This is discussed below.

debate about slavery. The foremost of these local clergy involved in the slavery debate was Dr Beilby Porteus, Bishop of Chester from 1776 to 1787, who exercised a good deal of influence in both Liverpool and Manchester. His authority was only partially tempered in Liverpool by the rights granted by charter to the local Corporation and not hindered by any official body in Manchester.⁸

Despite Chester's close links to Liverpool and Manchester, its continuing prosperity was largely due to its traditional small-scale industries along with established agricultural and mercantile activities, rather than any ventures connected with the rapid industrialisation that was taking place in the north and east of the county, across the border in North Wales and across the Mersey in Lancashire. The port remained relatively busy for a time with its well-established coastal and Irish trades, utilising its position on the canal infrastructure and helping to maintain its traditional position as a centre for the importation and distribution of Irish linen and the export of Flintshire coal and Cheshire cheese. This continued despite the rapidly deteriorating channels of the Dee estuary and in the face of strong competition from the growing Cheshire transshipment ports of Runcorn and Ellesmere Port on the less troublesome Mersey estuary, as well as from Liverpool. However, circumstances were against a long continuation, and the port experienced a slow decline through to the 1830s, when the customs posts at Parkgate (approximately ten miles upstream on the Dee estuary from the city) were finally closed, leaving just the 'creek port' of Mostyn in Flintshire in operation, effectively closing the port of Chester.⁹

Commercial activities connected to the growth of new manufacturing industries in the North West of England and parts of North Wales seemed to bypass Chester almost entirely. The nature and scale of the textile trade in the city provides an illustration of

⁸ Porteus' activities are discussed below and in chapter 7, 'The Political life of Dr Beilby Porteus'.

⁹ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, pp. 170, 203, 265.

this. Even by the 1820s, the cotton industry had made very little mark on the city, and it seems that Chester's economy could manage well enough without it.

The Pigot *Directory of Cheshire* for 1822-3, which describes the city of Chester as 'large, wealthy and ancient', lists seven business involved in textile processing and manufacture. These were two 'breeches makers', two 'flax dressers', two 'lace and fringe manufacturers' and one 'stocking manufacturer'. Other than the clothing and drapery retailers we would expect to find in any sizeable town, only two textile merchants are listed, and both of these as 'linen dealers'. The introduction to the 1822-3 directory informs us that a cotton mill had been established in the outskirts of the city, on the banks of the Nantwich Canal (as the Shropshire Union Canal was then known locally) along with a lead manufacturer and a 'pyrolygnous [*sic*] acid works' in the city. However, there were no other cotton processors, manufacturers or merchants listed in the directory. It was cotton, which in vast quantities was being imported, spun, weaved, finished and exported almost on Chester's doorstep that was driving much of the expansion of the city's neighbouring towns. This seems to show that despite its close geographic, commercial, religious and political connections to the centres of the cotton trade and industry, the city's own successful economy was for the most part able to run along familiar, traditional lines, using long established trading links, which though declining in national importance, continued to bring sufficient prosperity to its economic élite.

A brief comparison of Chester's textile industry with that of Congleton, a small Cheshire town in the foot hills of the Peak District thirty-one miles distant from Chester and twenty-four from Manchester, helps to illustrate that Chester managed to buck the regional economic trend. Congleton, though a much smaller town than Chester, with 6,400 inhabitants as opposed to the county town's 20,000, was a town

of some antiquity with charters dating back to the 1270s. The silk industry was fairly well established in this part of Cheshire by the end of the eighteenth century, with John Clayton founding the town's first mill in 1752 in the grounds of the local workhouse.¹⁰ In the ensuing period, the silk industry in Congleton underwent significant growth alongside a growing number of cotton processing works.

Congleton's industrial growth had very little to do with influence from Chester, but was rather a response to developments in Manchester. Cotton spinning and weaving arrived in the town in the 1780s, and by the early 1820s, the town was home to a thriving cotton industry, with many firms combining cotton and silk manufacture. Altogether, more than 4,000 people were employed in the textile industry in Congleton.¹¹ However, whereas employees in this industry had traditionally worked under the domestic putting out system for mercantile capitalists, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the bulk of textile operatives were mainly employed by industrialists and were working under the factory system.¹² By the late 1820s, Congleton's industrial base had expanded further. This is evinced by the 1828-9 directory, which lists five cotton spinners and manufacturers. In addition there were still expanding silk manufacturing activities, and twenty-three machine makers who would have provided a service to the increasingly mechanised factories. In the same year, Chester's involvement was restricted to the solitary mill on the banks of the Nantwich Canal, and it appears that no machine makers were at work in the city.¹³ This indicates both the scale of the cotton industry's expansion in the region and the strength of traditional economic activities in Chester, which enabled the city to keep its distance from the excesses of industrialisation. Further, it demonstrates that though

¹⁰ A. Calladine and J. Fricker, *East Cheshire Textile Mills*, (London, 1993), pp. 10, 25.

W. B. Stevens (ed.), *History of Congleton* (Manchester, 1970), pp. 85, 138.

¹¹ *Pigot's 1822-3 Directory of Cheshire*, p. 9; Stevens, *History of Congleton*, pp. 137-42.

¹² Calladine and Fricker, *East Cheshire Textile Mills*, p. 106.

¹³ *Pigot's 1828-9 Directory of Cheshire*, pp. 16-25.

Chester's élite remained in their traditional positions, elsewhere in the county, a new economic élite was emerging, whose commercial activities, political ideology and objectives differed greatly to those whose local positions of power they were challenging.

In addition to importing Irish linen, Chester was also a centre for the trade in linen produced locally. Flax, the raw material from which linen is produced, was a common and long established crop in much of Cheshire. The directory's listing of two flax dressers along with the linen dealers confirms the survival of a traditional cottage textile industry and trade in the city. This was at a time when cotton, which was behind the massive industrial, urban and economic growth in areas which had until recently looked to Chester as their regional centre, had come to dominate world textile markets.

Chester had long been a regional cultural, commercial and maritime centre for much of North Wales, with a long-established coastal trade to Welsh ports and relatively extensive road links to the major inland and Deeside settlements in Denbighshire and Flintshire.¹⁴ By the 1820s, the county towns of Denbigh and Flint had developed little and, at best, maintained their roles as rural markets and local administrative centres, with populations of approximately 300 and 1,600 respectively in 1822.¹⁵ Similarly, Mold, a market town in Flintshire and the ancient town of Ruthin in Denbighshire had not played host to any significant industrial development. In addition to the long established extraction of the relatively poor quality coal that lay very close to the surface in this part of North Wales, traditional domestic industries were carried out in these towns, and they continued largely to trade produce between themselves and other relatively isolated Welsh settlements. The locally

¹⁴ *Pigot's 1822 Directory of North Wales*, pp. 722-32; *Pigot's 1822-3 Directory of Cheshire*, p. 8; Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, p. 37.

¹⁵ A. H. Dodd, *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales* (1933; reprint, Wrexham, 1990), p. 285.

extracted coal largely serviced its traditional domestic market, rather than the needs of the developing copper and lead mines in Flintshire. As local coal was too impure to be used for smelting metal, much Flintshire ore was actually smelted in Lancashire and transported back to Flintshire for final manufacture, or smelted in the industrial areas of the county on the banks of the Dee, using more suitable, imported coal. Despite their lack of industrially driven growth, these rural communities in North Wales were by no means entirely isolated. They maintained commercial links with the Welsh West Coast port of Holyhead on the Island of Anglesey and with larger English market towns on the Welsh Marches, their traditional economic centres, chiefly Shrewsbury and Chester.¹⁶

Wrexham was a town of a similar size to Mold, but one that appears to have developed more extensive commercial and cultural connections, boasting a Unitarian meeting house and school by the 1820s. However, although Wrexham remained relatively untouched by industrialisation, it had strong commercial links with many of the manufacturing regions of Britain. Its market attracted traders from England selling woollen goods, Irish linen and goods manufactured in Yorkshire, Manchester and the West Midlands, as well as those from North Wales selling flannels and other locally produced textiles and livestock.¹⁷

Wrexham's links with industrial areas of England and the existence of a Unitarian school in the town suggest that it had the potential to play host to anti-slavery sentiment, but its falling under the influence of larger centres seems to have dictated that, like inhabitants of other small towns in the region, supporters of the anti-slavery cause in the town would have carried out their activities in these larger centres. The town could boast one link to abolitionism, however. Local Unitarian iron

¹⁶ *Pigot's 1822 Directory of North Wales*, pp. 722-4, 728-9.

¹⁷ *Pigot's 1822 Directory of North Wales*, p. 730.

master, Isaac Wilkinson, sent his son, William, to the school attached to the Dissenting chapel in Nantwich, where Joseph Priestly was minister and tutor. It was here that Priestly met William Wilkinson's elder sister, Mary, whom he married in 1762 in Warrington.¹⁸ We can see that during our period, Chester was still acting as a regional economic centre for these Welsh settlements, providing an extra market for their coal, small scale manufacturing output and agricultural produce as well as a port for these goods' wider distribution and export. This was despite Manchester and Liverpool each increasingly influencing the economic development of the area.

If we examine the links between Chester and the newly industrialised settlement of Holywell, we see a somewhat different picture, with Chester losing much of its relevance, as the new town's links to the industrial centres in the region became increasingly important. Holywell, connected by the mile long Greenfield Valley to the Dee estuary, lay on the Holyhead to Chester road and in 1822, two coaches in each direction served the town: one daily (The Royal Mail coach), the other thrice weekly. Holywell had grown as a result of industrialisation, especially the manufacture of cotton and paper, and with a population of over 8,000, was by Welsh standards of the time a very large town. In addition to the mail service and a daily packet boat service from Chester to Bagillt, about a mile upstream from Holywell on the Dee, there was a solitary carrier, taking goods on a daily basis to and from the city in 1822. By 1828, this carriage service had declined to a twice weekly operation and to once per week in 1834, by which time there was only an occasional service down

¹⁸ P. O'Brien, *Warrington Academy 1757-86; Its Predecessors and Successors* (Wigan, 1989), p. 57; R. E. Schofield, 'Priestly, Joseph', in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography From the earliest Times to the year 2000*, 56 (Oxford 2004), p. 353.

the Dee from Chester to Flint, Bagillt and Holywell, all of which illustrates the decreasing importance of Chester as a market for Holywell's goods.¹⁹

Unlike the majority of its neighbouring settlements, Holywell was a manufacturing centre and in common with other mining and manufacturing districts in England and Wales, the Holywell area experienced a good deal of industrial, political and religious unrest during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was not the type of activity that took place in Chester.²⁰ It would seem that despite Chester's traditional position as a regional centre for this part of North Wales, the city's economic influence was limited on this stretch of the Dee coast to non-industrial commercial activities. In 1777, John Smalley set up the first cotton mill in the Greenfield Valley at Holywell. Smalley died in 1782 and his son Christopher took over the business, building a further three mills in the valley between 1783 and 1790.²¹ By the time of the construction of the last of these mills, Christopher Smalley had refinanced the company with Manchester money, the most prominent new partner being John Douglas, a member of a Manchester family of cotton spinners, manufacturers and merchants. By this time the firm was trading variously as 'Douglas and Co.', 'Douglas Smalley and Co.' or 'The (Holywell) Cotton Twist Company.'²²

The expansion of industrial activity in Holywell came about in part through its advantageous situation, close to reserves of coal, ores and timber for raw materials with a suitable watercourse for power, and clearly through the availability of investment capital from Manchester, the centre of the cotton industry, and not from

¹⁹ *Pigot's 1822 Directory of North Wales*, pp. 724-5; *Pigot's 1822-3 Directory of Cheshire*, p. 8; *Pigot's 1828-9 Directory of Cheshire*, p. 22; *Pigot's 1834 Directory of Cheshire*, p. 26.

²⁰ D. Jones, *Before Rebecca, Popular protests in Wales 1793-1835* (London, 1973), pp. 22-3, 119, 192-5.

²¹ B. Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape* (London, 1982), pp. 50, 66, 81; P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation, An economic History of Britain*, second edition (1983), p. 111.

²² *Lewis's Directory of Manchester for 1788* (reprint, Manchester, 1982), p. 8; Dodd, *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales*, p. 285.

nearby Chester. If we consider the nature of the goods produced in the area, we can see that this expansion also came about through its proximity to the English industrial centres in South Lancashire. The output of the local cotton industry, calico, dimity, fustian, gingham and muslin was akin to that of Lancashire's and Manchester's manufacturers and very different to traditional wool, wincey and linen goods still produced elsewhere in North Wales.²³ It is also relevant that Holywell's cotton products were the types of cloth commonly used in the Africa trade, which further indicates that the town was now increasingly in Liverpool's and Manchester's economic orbit, rather than Chester's.

The local copper production also tied the area to the slave trade and the growing importance of the Port of Liverpool and provides further evidence of Holywell's gravitation to the new regional centres. The copper vessels and wire produced in the town were common trade goods for English merchants in Africa. Further, the town's copper industry produced copper bottoms for wooden ships sailing in tropical waters. For wooden sailing boats, one tropical voyage would usually be the limit for the iron nails and bolts holding the vessel together before they rotted. The copper bottoms produced at Holyhead improved the longevity of service for vessels plying such waters, and by extension improved the returns on investments made in ventures to the tropics, a significant proportion of which were the African and West Indies trades from Liverpool. Vessels used in Chester's traditional coastal and Irish trades would have no need for such protection.

Whilst Holywell's proximity to Chester ensured that the English city still maintained a certain amount of influence in its immediate environs, the town's industries would have required considerably more extensive transportation facilities

²³ Dodd, *The Industrial Revolution in North Wales*, pp. 229-81, 285.

than could be provided by the rather scant transport links between the town and Chester. Although the timber that provided the raw materials for the paper manufacturers was imported from Welsh forests and could be floated from various points on the Welsh coast up the Dee to the mouth of the Holywell stream, the cotton industry required raw materials to be imported from much further afield: the East or West Indies. Obviously, this meant that the town needed to be connected to a port and regional centre that imported and traded in cotton. It seems logical to assume for reasons of simple commercial expediency that the same port would handle the distribution and export of Holywell's finished goods. Given that the port of Chester did not import or export cotton in any significant quantities, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the industrial manufacturers of Holywell traded through and forged economic links with a different port, Liverpool being the obvious candidate.

Gore's 1796 *Liverpool Directory* provides us with evidence that there was a certain amount of commerce between the city and ports along the whole West coast, including those in North Wales. Under the heading Coastal Traders, the directory advertises 'constant traders to Preston, Lancaster, Ulverston, Milnthrop, Carlisle, Whitehaven, all Parts of Scotland, the North and South coasts of Wales'.²⁴ Of course, much of this trade would have been in the traditional Welsh staples of slate, coal and wool, but the links are apparent. They became more formalised as the nineteenth century progressed. The 1824-25 *Baines Directory of Lancashire* specifically lists three traders carrying goods between Liverpool and Holywell. It would seem that the three coastal traders carrying goods between Liverpool and Holywell along with coastal vessels owned by the local industrial concerns would have had sufficient capacity to handle the needs of the Welsh town's industry. This cargo traffic and the

²⁴ *Gore's Liverpool Directory, or, Alphabetical List of the Merchants, Tradesmen, and Principal Inhabitants, of the Town of Liverpool* (1796), p. 238.

provision of a daily passenger service by the Cambrian Steam Packet Company further underlines the significant interaction between the two areas.²⁵

A further illustration of Chester's waning influences in Holywell and the Welsh town's growing stature is the new town's lack of reliance upon Chester's bankers. As discussed above, the expansion of Hollywell Cotton Twist Company in the 1780s and 90s was financed by investment capital from Manchester. In 1822, there were three banks operating in Holywell, all of which were owned by industrialists with interests in the town: these were Williams & Dicas, Richard Sankey, and Douglas, Smalley & Company. The latter two of these were still trading in 1834. The lack of investment capital from Cestrian concerns is a further illustration that Hollywell's economic ties were with Manchester.²⁶

We can see that, despite encroachment into its traditional hinterland from Liverpool, Manchester and to a lesser extent Warrington, Chester retained much of its economic independence from its larger neighbours and still exerted a fair degree of influence in the less industrialised areas across the county of Cheshire and into much of North Wales during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By the time of organised anti-slavery, the city had ceased its modest direct involvement with the slave trade and had very little to do with the two chief slave-grown staples, cotton and sugar. Given this, we might expect arguments on either side of the slave debate in this setting to reflect alternative interests and motivations and to be framed differently from those in Manchester and Liverpool, where protagonists were more directly and closely tied to the issue, where changes in power structures were taking place to reflect changes in the economic organisation, and perhaps most importantly, where

²⁵ E. Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster; with a Variety of Commercial & Statistical Information* (1824-5), pp. 460-61; *Pigot's 1822 Directory of Lancashire*, p. 140.

²⁶ Appendix to *Pigot's 1834 Directory of Cheshire*; *Pigot's 1834 Directory of North Wales*, p.724; Davies and Williams, *Greenfield Valley*, p. 14.

considerably larger sums of money were at stake. The anti-slavery cause did not seem to create very much of a stir in Chester. In the rest of the county, people's interests, ideas and allegiances would be subject to influence from Manchester, Liverpool, Warrington and Chester to varying degrees, in addition to the purely local forces. Due to improvements in the transport infrastructure, links within the county of Cheshire were strong, as were its regional and national connections.

The central, salt producing area of Cheshire had traditionally looked to Nantwich as its local economic centre. This continued even as the salt production of neighbouring towns, such as Winsford and Northwich, eclipsed that of Nantwich. Referring to the Shropshire Union as the 'Nantwich Canal' attests the traditional links and trading routes between Chester and the central Cheshire salt producing towns, but by the 1780s, the bulk of Cheshire's salt was exported from the Mersey, rather than the Dee.²⁷

As discussed below, Nantwich and Chester retained some of their local importance, but central Cheshire merchants increasingly looked to Liverpool and Manchester. This is evinced by industrial developments in Nantwich during the early nineteenth century. As the salt industry in the town declined, leaving only two establishments, one manufacturer and one trader by the late 1820s, shoe manufacturing became the major industry in Nantwich. Goods manufactured in Nantwich were sold in Manchester and London markets, rather than in Chester.²⁸ The cotton industry, taking advantage of the improved inland waterways, was also established in the town, having reached this far into Cheshire as early as the late

²⁷ This is discussed below and in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

²⁸ *Pigot's 1828-9 Directory of Cheshire*, pp. 42, 44-5. *Pigot's 1834 Directory of Cheshire*, pp. 51-2.

eighteenth century. William Seddon, a fustian manufacturer from the mid-Cheshire village of Lostock was dealing from premises in Deansgate, Manchester in 1788.²⁹

The area of Cheshire, east of the Wirral peninsula, covering the south bank of the upper reaches of the Mersey estuary acted as a conduit for the export of Cheshire salt and was the hub of the inland water communications links between Manchester and Liverpool and the important extraction and manufacturing industries of Cheshire, Staffordshire and the west Midlands. Additionally, the area made significant contributions to the economic growth of both Manchester and Liverpool, benefiting in turn from its proximity to the country's largest textile manufacturing region and the major west coast port. The River Weaver, a tributary of the Mersey, was for many years the much busier waterway, carrying salt from central Cheshire to the Weaver's mouth on the Mersey estuary between Frodsham and Runcorn. The improvements to the Weaver in the 1730s coincided with improvements to the Mersey and Irwell system, which connected Manchester to the Mersey estuary at Runcorn. This led to an invigoration of activity in the old port of Runcorn and introduced ship building into the area, initially at Frodsham in the 1720s and then in the 1780s into Runcorn.³⁰

The relatively rapid growth of ship building in Frodsham and Runcorn came about as a direct consequence of the port of Liverpool's expansion. Shipbuilders in Liverpool were unable to keep up with the rapid growth in demand for new vessels, which were needed to meet the needs of the increased coastal and canal trade. This was compounded by the Liverpool yards being squeezed out of the prime port sites, as the volume of trade, especially international trade, at the port demanded more and

²⁹ *Lewis's Directory of Manchester for 1788*, p. 30; *Pigot's 1828-9 Directory of Cheshire*, pp. 42, 44-5. *Pigot's 1834 Directory of Cheshire*, pp. 51-2.

³⁰ H.F. Starkey, *Schooner Port, Two Centuries of Upper Mersey Sail* (1983; reprint, Bebbington, 1998), pp. 29-31, 194, 199-200.

better dock facilities.³¹ Ship building yards and other related industries further up the estuary benefited from this, and the industry expanded on both banks of the Mersey as far upstream as Warrington.³²

Although most of the vessels built in Runcorn and Frodsham were coasters, or ‘flats’ built especially for negotiating the perilous Mersey estuary, a number of ocean going vessels were built locally. Two of particular interests, which were built in Frodsham, were the brigantines, *Ann* (launched in 1737) and *Benin* (launched in 1746). Despite their small displacement (thirty five and fifty tons respectively), both these vessels made sea voyages of considerable length. *Benin*, which was registered at Liverpool, seems to have operated either as a slave vessel, or more likely a tender to slave vessels on the west coast of Africa, before being lost, apparently as a prize of war. *Ann*’s history is a little more certain. In 1741, she arrived at Lancaster from Barbados and appears in Liverpool’s shipping register in 1747, leaving that city for Virginia.³³ This suggests that the merchant community in Frodsham were certainly aware of the slave trade and were able to take advantage of it to a small degree. Thus adding to the town’s existing links with Liverpool and illustrating the expansion of Liverpool’s influence into areas that traditionally looked to Chester as their regional centre.

In addition to Frodsham-built ships making a small contribution to Liverpool’s trades with Africa, mainland America and the West Indies, smaller vessels built in the town continued to operate on the inland and coastal waterways around the city. Further, a significant amount of the Cheshire salt, which was so important to

³¹ F.E. Hyde, *Liverpool and the Mersey, the Development of a Port, 1700 – 1900* (Newton Abbot, 1971), p. 70.

³² Pigot’s 1818, 1819 & 1820 *Directory*, pp. 460-65; Baines, *History, Directory, and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, p. 587.

³³ Starkey, *Schooner Port*, pp. 28, 198.

Liverpool's economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not least in the West Indian and African trades, continued to be transhipped or processed at Frodsham.³⁴

Runcorn, which had previously occupied something of a *cul de sac* and had been of no real importance since the fifteenth century, became the dominant town of the locality; the town forged strong links with Manchester, Liverpool and Warrington, but had few with its county town. The naming of Runcorn built vessels, *Worsley* and *Manchester* in 1792 and *Rochdale* in 1794 provide us with a clue that the town had strong commercial Mancunian connections.³⁵ The number of carriers operating on the canal system from the Runcorn area to all parts of the country provide further evidence of Runcorn's increasingly scant links with the county town. The *Pigot Directory* of 1828-9 lists two carriers (Samuel Wylde and Crossfield and Co.) out of a total of twenty four that carried goods to Chester. In the 1834 *Directory*, there are thirty-one businesses listed carrying goods by water from Runcorn and Preston Brook. Of these, only Samuel Wylde offered a service to Chester, which would suggest that links to the county town were not particularly strong or important. Runcorn's stronger links with its larger neighbours and other manufacturing centres further afield is underlined by the advertised destinations of the other Runcorn and Preston Brook carriers, who were operating services to the West Country, West Midlands, central and East Cheshire, London, the Potteries and of course, Liverpool and Manchester. Though there were regular services to Manchester, Liverpool, Warrington and Northwich, the canal packet service to Chester, had ceased running by the early 1830s.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 5, 29-30; Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, pp. 99-100.

³⁵ Starkey, *Schooner Port*, p. 194.

³⁶ *Pigot's 1828-9 Directory of Cheshire*, pp. 49-51; *Pigot's 1834 Directory of Cheshire*, pp. 60-63.

With Chester's lack of involvement with much of the growth of local industry, it is hardly surprising that the city's links to this heavily industrialised part of the county, like those with the newly industrialised Hollywell, were not so strong. The growth in trade and population in the North of the county came about entirely through industrial expansion and the improved inland water transport communications that accompanied it. The alkali industry in Runcorn, taking advantage of the recent canal and river improvements in the area, grew to meet the demands of the textile industry in Lancashire and North East Cheshire. The town's position at the hub of the north western inland waterway system meant that in addition to importing its own industries' raw materials and exporting their manufactured goods, Runcorn was the transshipment port for much of Manchester's and Lancashire's raw materials and finished goods. The town was also an export or transshipment conduit for manufactured goods from the Potteries and West Midlands in addition to a great deal of Cheshire salt. This area of Cheshire unavoidably had a broad range of commercial links to the large regional centres; its economic growth can also be seen, therefore, to have close and fairly direct ties to both the trade in slaves and that in slave-grown raw materials.

This part of the shared hinterland of Manchester and Liverpool was increasingly subject to the influences of both cities, with Chester's economic and cultural orbit becoming less relevant. Increasing activity at the three docks and the growth of industrial manufacturing in the Runcorn area attracted a significant number of immigrants. Although the majority of these moved in from nearby Cheshire or South Lancashire villages, a significant number were Dissenting artisans and labourers from North Wales. There was also a large and growing middle-class population in the area, consisting of both merchant and industrialist capitalists. Given

that the issue of slavery was being debated vociferously in Manchester and Liverpool and that the local community seems to have hosted the correct mix of religious Dissent, protectionist and free-trade interest, we might expect to see an echo of the protagonists' activities in the area. The evidence seems to suggest that this was not the case, however. While a significant number of more scantily populated, relatively more isolated and less economically developed settlements across Britain joined the petitioning campaign against slavery in 1823, neither Frodsham, the traditional local centre, or Runcorn, the booming new industrial town and canal port, contributed petitions to the campaign. It seems that these new and growing settlements were not large enough at this time to support any organised reform or anti-slavery organisations, and interested parties would have to travel to larger local conurbations to make their contributions.

A total of 227 anti-slavery petitions to abolish slavery were submitted to Parliament in the 1823 session. Two of these were sent from towns in Cheshire: Chester and Nantwich.³⁷ The submission of just two petitions from the entire county would seem to suggest that support for abolitionism across Cheshire was not very strong or numerous, and certainly not sufficiently well organised to contribute significantly to the petitioning campaign. This is illustrated by a comparison of Cheshire's record against that of the less heavily industrialised county of Norfolk. In addition to one sent from the 'County of Norfolk', the towns of Diss, Cromer, Attleborough, and the county town of Norwich were responsible for sending further petitions.

However, we need to consider that the growth of urbanisation and industrialisation in Cheshire had largely taken place in the north of the county and that

³⁷ Preface to *Substance of The Debate in the House of Commons on the 15th May, 1823 on a Motion for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions*, pp. xxxvii – xxxix.

these areas, becoming the most populous in the county, were subject to influences from outside the county's borders. Much of the north east of Cheshire fell within Manchester's orbit. Liverpool largely dominated the towns across the Mersey on the Wirral peninsula in the north west of the county, while north central Cheshire largely looked towards Warrington. This latter town, whose growth could by no means be compared with that in Liverpool and Manchester, nevertheless became an important manufacturing and trading centre in its own right with strong local cultural and commercial links and exerted a fair amount of local influence.³⁸ Warrington was certainly a significant town as far as the anti-slavery and reform movements were concerned. It was a large enough town to support organised movements and played host to a significant number of anti-slavery sympathisers (discussed below).

The bulk of the rest of Cheshire's population was largely centred around the city of Chester and in the central salt-producing towns, such as Winsford, Northwich and Nantwich. As stated above, both Chester and Nantwich also submitted petitions in 1823. Traditional, economic activities in the city of Chester, and in central Cheshire remained relatively untouched by the industrialisation taking place to their north and east. It seems that here, local people remained in their established economic, social and political orbits. That the industrial settlements in North Cheshire (and those in South Lancashire, such as Widnes, St. Helens and Wigan) failed to organise petitions for the campaign could well be due to their close ties to Liverpool, Manchester and Warrington. It had never been so easy to travel into and around Cheshire and South Lancashire, and increased trade and industrial expansion dictated that a large number of people increasingly had a need to do so.³⁹ Given this, if the merchants of Cheshire

³⁸ J. Rule, *The Vital Century: England's Developing Economy, 1714-1815* (Harlow, 1992), p. 99; Pigot's *Commercial Directory for 1818, 1819 & 1820*, pp. 460-85; Baines, *History, Directory, and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, pp. 579-601.

³⁹ Rule, *The Vital Century*, p. 99.

were close enough to Liverpool to take advantage of slave-trading opportunities there, then perhaps abolitionist sympathisers in the North of the county were sufficiently close to centres of reform activity in South Lancashire to contribute their signatures to petitions in Liverpool, Manchester and Warrington rather than organise their own.

In a similar vein, it seems that sympathisers in what remained of Chester's sphere of influence in West Cheshire and North Wales could have subscribed to that city's own petition. We may be safe in concluding that sympathisers from towns in central Cheshire, such as Northwich and Winsford, which by the 1820s were the main salt producing centres, could have subscribed to the petition organised in their traditional local commercial centre, Nantwich. The same pattern can be discerned in Wales. A total of five petitions were sent from the principality. These were from Bedwellty, Carmarthen, Neath, Swansea and the county of Pembroke, all in the south of the country. No petitions were sent from towns in North Wales, which for the most part looked to Chester as their regional centre, nor were any petitions sent from towns in East Wales, whose links to England were with Chester and market towns in Shropshire and Herefordshire. These two rural counties sent three petitions between them; these were from Leominster and Bridgnorth, both in Herefordshire and one from the County of Shropshire.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the petitions themselves were destroyed by fire in 1834, and it is impossible to check the residences of the signatories. While this makes it difficult to make concrete claims of activities at such a micro local level, it is nevertheless tempting and logical to conclude that those commercial and cultural centres in the region would also act as centres of reform and agitation.

⁴⁰ Preface to *Substance of The Debate in the House of Commons on the 15th May, 1823 on a Motion for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery*, pp. xxxvii – xxxix.

If we consider the north and east of the county, we can see similar gravitational forces at work, with the centre being Manchester. None of the industrial towns in this part of the county organised petitions to Parliament as part of the 1823 campaign. Since these towns were all very much in Manchester's cultural and economic orbit, we are perhaps once again safe in assuming that local abolitionist sympathisers would sign the petition in Manchester, rather than drawing the conclusion that the cause had no support in these areas.

Macclesfield was an established centre of the silk industry, and the town enjoyed significant road links to Manchester, Chester, Birmingham and London, but no connection to the canal system until the 1830s. Nevertheless the town's industrial base and volume of trade expanded and its population increased rapidly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries⁴¹ Despite the lack of an inland waterway connection, Macclesfield quickly developed as a manufacturing town gravitating towards Manchester and away from Chester, which (as discussed earlier) did not develop as an industrial manufacturing centre, though the city did enjoy a connection to the canal system.

As in Manchester, prior to the reform of Parliament, there was an alliance between middle-class and working-class activists in unrepresented Macclesfield. Although there seems to have been no formally organised groups in the town up to the early 1830s, it was home to a significant number of radical and reform sympathisers. On the evening of 15 August 1819, Henry Hunt stopped at Macclesfield en route to St. Peter's Field in Manchester and addressed a large audience of supporters who were unable to attend the rally, which took place the following day. On 17 August, a crowd attacked the homes of rich Tories in the town, including the Mayor's and those

⁴¹ G. Malmgreen, *Silk Town: Industry and Culture in Macclesfield 1750-1835* (Hull, 1985), pp. 21, 79; J. Stevenson, 'Social aspects of the Industrial Revolution', in P. O'Brien and R. Quinault (eds), *The Industrial Revolution and British Society* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 238-9.

of members of the Yeoman Cavalry who had reported for duty in Manchester.⁴² One local casualty of the fallout of this activity in Macclesfield was the hat maker turned bookseller, Joseph Swann, who later became William Cobbett's agent in Stockport. He was frequently the subject of the authority's attention and was jailed twice (in 1819 and 1831) as a 'vendor of seditious literature'.⁴³

Macclesfield was very much in Manchester's orbit, with reformers in the town coming from a similar, often Dissenting, cross-class background and having close ties with their Mancunian counterparts. In the light of this, we might expect that the town, like Manchester, would be host to abolitionist sympathisers. Indeed, there is evidence of some degree of support in Macclesfield for the campaign to abolish the slave trade. A case brought before the local magistrates in 1826 provides an illustration of this support from amongst Macclesfield's working-class population. It also provides evidence of local support for the claim made by many radicals that the conditions of the Caribbean slaves were preferable to those endured by the British working class. The defendant was a Macclesfield artisan named Cosgrove who had been put to work on the roads by the local overseers of the poor, but had left his work to go to the races. He complained to the court:

We are so oppressed, by one Beggar or another put over us to watch us ... I say we are [oppressed]; punish me as you wish, just like a soldier; aye you may flog me through the town if that will do you any good. I am sorry I had ever anything to do with abolishing the Slave Trade, when I'm a slave myself.⁴⁴

This case provides evidence that the local industrial working class faced extreme hardship. It was also symptomatic of the (understandably) lax attitude towards their 'duties' on the part of the impoverished and disenfranchised, for whom

⁴² Malmgreen, *Silk Town*, p. 112.

⁴³ *Ibid.* pp. 112-3; M. J. Turner, *Reform and Respectability, The Making of a Middle Class Liberalism in Early 19th-Century Manchester* (Manchester, 1995), p. 274; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), pp. 803-4.

⁴⁴ *The Macclesfield Courier*, 29 July 1826; Malmgreen, *Silk Town*. p. 69.

freer trade had often meant less liberty and more hardship, when it had seemed to offer the opposite, and exacerbated some of the domestic problems that the abolitionist Bishop Beilby Porteus tried to resolve throughout his career.

In a case which revolved around another of Bishop Porteus' 'pet' problems, that of Anglican churches being used for Methodist worship and Anglican clergymen's inappropriately close ties with Methodism, we can see that there was also middle-class support in Macclesfield for the campaign to abolish the trade in slaves. The Rev. David Simpson, assistant curate at St. Michael's church in Macclesfield from 1773 to 1775, was an Anglican with very strong Methodist sympathies and an ardent defender of Nonconformists' rights. His unorthodox combination of Anglicanism and Methodism made him popular with some sections of the local community. However, a more orthodox, conservative group of parishioners prevented him from being appointed to the Prime Curacy of the parish in 1775, with Dr Markham, Porteus' predecessor as Bishop of Chester, appointing his own favoured candidate instead. Simpson's evangelicalism soon caused him considerable trouble with his new superior, Rev. Thomas Hewson, who accused his assistant of promoting Methodism. On one occasion, Hewson physically removed Simpson from the pulpit and, eventually, he prevented him from preaching at the church altogether. This caused considerable unrest in the town, with a mob following Hewson home after one service, when he had reneged on a promise to readmit Simpson. Hewson complained to the bishop, who himself ordered that Simpson be temporarily suspended from preaching.⁴⁵

The dispute was never really settled, but a local manufacturer, Charles Roe, an industrialist with interests across the North West of England and in North Wales and

⁴⁵ Malmgreen, *Silk Town*, p. 148; J. Howard Hodson, *Cheshire, 1660-1780: Restoration to Industrial Revolution* (Chester, 1978), pp. 42-3; M. Smith, 'Simpson, David', in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 50 (Oxford 2004), pp. 684-5.

the son of an Anglican clergyman, funded the building of a large new church for Simpson in 1775 (Christ Church).⁴⁶ Simpson was extremely popular with all classes of people in Macclesfield, and much of St. Michael's congregation followed Simpson to the new church. Here, he delivered lengthy sermons on a broad range of issues, including corruption in the Anglican Church, the dangers of Jacobinism and the 'evils of slavery'. He was a political moderate, but even in his disagreements with (often conformist) radicals, he was careful to concede that their object was just, but their methods extreme and dangerous. He argued that things could be 'altered for the better', but that 'such melioration of the state of things will gradually take place'.⁴⁷ Simpson's Methodist connections were very strong and at his invitation, John Wesley himself preached at Christ Church several times. Whilst they shared similar views on many issues, including slavery, this kind of behaviour did not endear him to his bishop, though Simpson maintained his position of considerable influence in the town with manufacturers, artisans and labourers alike.⁴⁸

The Greg family of Styal in Cheshire provide a further illustration of the political and economic links across the region, the gravitation of activity towards the new regional centres, and also the selectivity of causes supported by middle-class reformers in the area during the period. Greg was a Unitarian, free trade advocate, a keen follower of local and national political issues, and had significant connections with influential Liverpoolians and Mancunians. He had moved to Manchester from Belfast, aged eight, in 1766 to live with his childless uncle, Robert Hyde, a successful cotton manufacturer, for whom Greg started work in 1778. When Hyde died in 1782, Greg inherited £10,000, and his uncle's business. By 1788, he owned a house in the

⁴⁶ *Pigot's 1822 Directory of Cheshire*, p. 12; W. H. Chaloner, 'Charles Roe of Macclesfield (1715-1881): An Eighteenth-Century Industrialist', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 62 (1950-51), p. 133; Malmgreen, *Silk Town*, p. 14; ; Smith, 'Simpson, David', pp. 684-5.

⁴⁷ Malmgreen, *Silk Town*, p. 149; *Pigot's 1828-9 Directory of Cheshire*, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Malmgreen, *Silk Town*, pp. 147-9.

affluent King Street in central Manchester, where successful merchants, manufacturers and other members of the middle-class élite also made their homes. By the end of the eighteenth century, he was trading from premises in Chancery Lane in the city.⁴⁹ In 1784, he founded the first new installation of his family's cotton empire, at Quarry Bank Mills in Styal, Cheshire. Here he housed, educated and exercised a fair degree of social control over his workers, creating a rather isolated, purpose built mill community in 1796.⁵⁰ Greg was one of the leaders, along with the considerably more radical Thomas Walker, of Manchester's peace movement in the 1790s, and along with his sons was also an active member of several societies in the city.⁵¹

Isaac Hodgson, who was to become secretary of the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, was Samuel Greg's nephew and, for a number of years, his business partner at 'Low Mill' in Caton, just outside Lancaster. The Hodgsons seem to be a perfect example of Eric Williams' theory which states that industrial capitalism grew on the back of slavery, before discarding the institution when it became less profitable. Thomas Hodgson left his native Lancaster to make his fortune in the Liverpool Africa trade. His fortune made, he returned in 1784 to invest it in the founding of the 'Low Mill'.⁵² To complete the circle, his descendants, Isaac and Robert, were active in the campaigns against the slave trade and for emancipation.

The Greg family's Hodgson connection, along with their friendship with the Rathbone family (the Hodgsons were also in business with William Rathbone for a

⁴⁹ *Lewis's Directory of Manchester for 1788; Bancks's Manchester and Salford Directory 1800* (reprint, Manchester, 1982).

⁵⁰ M.B. Rose *The Gregs of Styal* (London, 1978), pp. 5, 8; M. B. Rose, 'Greg, Samuel', in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 (Oxford 2004), p. 644; P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-1783* (London, 1989), pp. 659-60.

⁵¹ Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, p. 45.

⁵² M. Elder, *The Slave Trade and the economic Development of Eighteenth-Century Lancaster* (Halifax, 1992), pp. 60, 188-9; M.B. Rose (ed.), *The Lancashire Cotton Industry, a History Since 1700* (Preston, 1996), p. 354.

time), underlines Samuel Greg's links with leading reform and abolition figures in Liverpool society. It reinforces the notion that business and political links in the region were to a large extent based upon 'friendship ties'.⁵³ Samuel Greg named one of his sons 'William Rathbone Greg', while William Rathbone III named one of his sons, 'Samuel Greg Rathbone'. In common with other industrialists such as Charles Roe from Macclesfield, the Greg family's business interests spread through the region into other parts of Cheshire and into Lancashire, with Samuel Greg acquiring and investing significant sums in cotton mills in the Lancaster area. Although the mill community at Styal was only nine miles from Manchester and obviously in the city's orbit, by some economic measures they were still very much part of Cheshire. Samuel Greg dealt with the frequent labour shortages that Styal's relatively isolated position would inevitably engender, by the *philanthropic* act of recruiting from the local workhouses. Manchester rates of pay, which could hardly be considered generous, did not apply at Quarry Bank. Despite Greg's disingenuous protestation that he paid his workers more than they could earn on local farms, wages at Quarry Bank were significantly lower than those paid in Manchester cotton mills.⁵⁴

The family were well known for their philanthropic activities and their involvement in political campaigns, including those for the reform of Parliament, against war with France, and against the Corn Laws. Robert Hyde Greg (named after Samuel Greg's uncle and benefactor), represented Manchester for two years in Parliament from 1839, as the Anti Corn League's own candidate. However, in common with other industrial middle-class reformists, it could perhaps be argued that the Gregs' reforming tendencies were based upon a furtherance of their own interests,

⁵³ B. Refford, 'Merchant Friends and the Social Construction of the Mid Eighteenth-Century Liverpool Slave Trade', paper delivered at *Port Cities: British Society & Maritime Culture* conference, Regional History Centre UWE Bristol, 17 Sep 2005.

⁵⁴ Rose *The Gregs of Styal*, pp. 10-12, 21, 25-6, 33; Rose, 'The Rise of the Cotton Industry in Manchester to 1830' Rose, *The Lancashire Cotton Industry*, p. 16; Malmgreen, *Silk Town*, p. 43.

rather than entirely humanitarian concerns. Their association with abolitionists in Manchester, such as Absalom Watkin, and their relationships and business connections with the Hodgsons and Rathbones signify some degree of empathy with the anti-slavery cause. In his personal correspondence with Samuel Greg, William Rathbone III was even prepared to discuss the Liverpool Society's business, decrying Dr Currie's relatively cautious approach and anonymity.⁵⁵

Illustrating the Gregs' desire to protect their own well being, the family were actively opposed to areas of reform that would adversely affect their direct interests. During the 1820s, both Robert Hyde Greg and William Rathbone Greg campaigned for the extension of the franchise. However, they opposed its extension to the working classes. Robert Hyde Greg believed the working class to be 'too easily carried away by passion, credulous and carried away by rumour' and was extremely reluctant to work alongside working-class activists in the campaign for parliamentary reform in the 1830s.⁵⁶ Here, their views differed somewhat from those of William Rathbone IV, who was an advocate of universal suffrage.

Despite their philanthropic activity, reformist connections and some apparently genuine concerns about poverty, the Gregs were no friends to the working class. In an attempt to justify their paying lower wages than mill owners in Manchester, Samuel and William Rathbone Greg reported to the Manchester Statistical Society in 1833 that cotton operatives' wages would be regarded as 'positive opulence' in agricultural districts.⁵⁷ The family were also very much opposed to the Ten Hour Bill, which would, Robert Hyde argued in 1837, force cotton

⁵⁵ F.E. Sanderson, 'Liverpool abolitionists', in Anstey and Hair, *Liverpool, The African Slave Trade and Abolition*, p. 217.

⁵⁶ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, pp. 170, 203; Rose, *The Gregs of Styal*, pp. 34-5; M. Goffin (ed.), *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin, A Manchester Man 1787 – 1861* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 126, 128, 148; Turner, *Reform and Respectability*, pp. 45, 283, 315.

⁵⁷ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire from AD 1540*, pp. 141-2; A. Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade 1794-1858* (Manchester, 1934), p. 230.

manufacturers to move abroad. Here we can see that much, if not all, of the Gregs' motivation for reform was driven by the desire to protect their own economic prosperity and improve their political influence. Given their connections with William Rathbone and Isaac Hodgson, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the Gregs were familiar with James Cropper's vision for the ending of slavery in the Caribbean and, in the process, increasing prosperity throughout Britain and her dominions, through free trade and the manufacture and export of cotton goods. Nor would it be unreasonable to conclude that Cropper's emphasis on the importance of cotton would have appealed to the Gregs. In the light of this, any sympathy for the anti-slavery cause, like other reform issues that the Gregs chose to support, could perhaps be seen as another example of them attempting to promote their own interests.

Although it had long been the largest of the three conurbations, Warrington lost much of its local importance to Liverpool and Manchester. Nevertheless the industrial base and population of Warrington continued to grow, at least partly in response to developments in both cities. Already a thriving manufacturing and market town, with a good deal of activity at the docks at Bank Quay and the ancillary maritime trades, especially sail making, Warrington acted as a minor regional industrial centre for central North Cheshire and South Lancashire, and had significant links with Liverpool, Manchester and Chester. Carriers by land and water between any two of the three cities would pass through and usually be scheduled to stop at Warrington.⁵⁸ Similarly, until the Bridgewater Canal was completed and its trade eclipsed that of the Mersey and Irwell system, carriers by water between Liverpool and Manchester would by necessity pass through Warrington. The town's Dissenting

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Raffald, *Manchester Directory for 1772* (reprint, Manchester, 1982); *Lewis's Directory of Manchester for 1788*, pp. 32-4; *Bancks's Manchester and Salford Directory*, pp. 60-62; Pigot's 1822-3 *Directory of Cheshire*, p. 8; Baines, *History, Directory, and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, pp. 579-601; Rule, *The Vital Century*, p. 99, p.140.

Academy (discussed below) was recognised as the most important institution of its type in the country for its excellence in commercial subjects and earned the town the title of ‘The Athens of the North’.⁵⁹

Warrington is situated at the head of the Mersey estuary and, until the late nineteenth century, was the site of the furthest bridge downstream across the Mersey, although there were a number of fords and ferries operating (with varying levels of reliability and peril) down the estuary. As maritime activities declined, losing the battle with the sandbanks and shifting channels of the upper estuary, manufacturing industry, especially in the forms of cotton and ironwork, began to take off in the town and its environs, with Warrington boasting the first steam powered cotton mill in Lancashire in 1787.⁶⁰ The cotton industry helped further cement Warrington’s already strong links with Manchester. In 1788, two fustian manufacturers, Thomas Richardson and Richard Boardman, from Culcheth and Orford respectively on Warrington’s outskirts, and a Mr Hart from the town itself were regularly trading from space rented at the Spread-Eagle Inn in Salford. By 1822, there were six textile manufacturers and processors (five fustian manufacturers and one bleacher) from Warrington and its immediate vicinity, with warehouses or space rented on a weekly basis in Manchester.⁶¹

Warrington was also established as an important cultural centre in its own right. This is evinced by the Warrington Academy, which opened in 1757 and whose most prominent alumnus was the chemist, philosopher, theologian, reformer and slave

⁵⁹ G. Claeys, ‘Virtuous Commerce and Free Theology: Political Economy and the Dissenting Academies 1750-1800’, in *History of Political Thought*, XX (1999), p. 146; H. Bright, ‘A Historic Sketch of Warrington Academy’, *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 11 (1858-9), p. 14.

⁶⁰ D.W. Lloyd, *The Making of English Towns 2000 years of evolution* (London, 1992), p. 161; Rule, *The Vital Century*, pp. 99, 122.

⁶¹ *Lewis’s Directory of Manchester for 1788*, pp. 27-8, 30; *Pigot’s 1822-3 Directory of Lancashire*, pp. 176, 180-81.

abolitionist, Dr Joseph Priestly, who was from 1761 to 1767 a tutor at the institution.⁶²

Priestly was a Unitarian, and an internationally respected academic in the fields of philosophy, chemistry and theology, gaining the reputation of being ‘the greatest of the many worthies of the Warrington Academy’.⁶³ He recognised the importance of successful commerce, and his opposition to slavery was based partly upon his qualified belief in the merits of free trade and was related to the growing antipathy he felt in common with other Dissenting reformers towards the Church of England and its protection of aristocratic interest. He was opposed to the aristocracy’s continued hold on political power and, like John Aiken Junior, was an advocate of the interests and values of the middle class, arguing that ‘there is not only the most virtue ... and happiness, but even most true politeness in the middle class of life’.⁶⁴

It would not be correct to conclude that Priestly was a supporter of unfettered capitalism *per se*, although he was an advocate of Adam Smith’s work. He saw religious liberty in the same light as mercantile freedom, arguing that the most harmful of governmental interventions was the imposition of one creed on all citizens. Despite some misgivings concerning British merchants, their best interests not necessarily being those of the country as a whole, he did see the nation’s progress and prosperity as being in large part dependent on the success of the mercantile and manufacturing middle classes’ ventures. He publicly stated his republican stance and support for the French Revolution as well as campaigning for the extension of the

⁶² O’Brien, *Warrington Academy*, pp. 57-62; Claeys, ‘Virtuous Commerce and Free Theology’, p. 147; Bright, ‘A Historic Sketch of Warrington Academy’, pp. 11-12; S. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery; British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 1987), p. 123.

⁶³ Claeys, ‘Virtuous Commerce and Free Theology’ p. 154; Bright, ‘A Historic Sketch of Warrington Academy’, pp. 11-12; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p.307; O’Brien, *Warrington Academy*, pp. 56-67.

⁶⁴ Joseph Priestley, Thomas Cooper, and William Christie (eds), *Memoirs of Dr. Joseph Priestley, to the year 1795*. (London, 1809), p.74, in D. Hay and N. Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society; Shuttles and Swords*, (Oxford, 1997), p. 192.

franchise to members of the Dissenting middle classes and for the abolition of slavery.⁶⁵

Priestly's unorthodox radical political and religious stance drew criticism from within and without the reform and abolitionist movement, including an attack from Samuel Horsley, who objected to his materialist outlook.⁶⁶ He also found himself at odds with his friend, Thomas Cooper, over the issue of education. Whereas Cooper advocated the provision of a national system of education, Priestly was not in favour of an education system administered by the state. He was suspicious of the state's involvement in such affairs, preferring a more *ad hoc* approach, which involved parents educating their children, supplemented by attendance at Sunday schools.⁶⁷ Priestly's aggressive approach to campaigning against religious intolerance drew criticism from his friend and former colleague at Warrington Academy, William Enfield, who believed that such aggression would damage the cause and undo the advances it had already made.⁶⁸

A further link between Warrington Academy and the anti-slavery and reform movements can be found in the offspring of the Academy's principal, John Aiken. His son and namesake was a student at the academy and a supporter of various reform and philanthropic causes, including abolition of the slave trade. He was an outspoken republican, who was not afraid to place himself at odds with the Establishment. Following a similar pattern of thought to Priestly's and in common with many alumni of the Dissenting Academies, John Aiken Junior believed that the Nonconformist

⁶⁵ J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti Slavery, the Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787 – 1807* (London, 1998), pp. 42-3, 81, 128; Claeys, 'Virtuous Commerce and Free Theology', pp. 156-9.

⁶⁶ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p.286; Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-slavery*, pp.20-1.

⁶⁷ H.T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1994), p. 187; Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-slavery*, p. 152.

⁶⁸ Webb, 'Enfield, William', in Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 18, p. 438.

middle class had a ‘special social mission’.⁶⁹ In 1790 he wrote that the Dissenters belonged to:

The most virtuous, the most enlightened, the most independent part of the community, the *middle* class. If the nation is ever to improve, or even if it is to retain, the freedom it possesses, to this class alone must it be indebted for the blessing.⁷⁰

Aiken’s daughter, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, was a celebrated writer and anti-slavery poet. Her education began under her father in Kibworth, Leicestershire. Having resigned his position as a minister due to ill health, Aiken ran a primary school for boys for six years until his appointment at Warrington in 1758, his daughter being the only girl on the school roll. Unlike her brother, Barbauld’s formal education had to cease when the family moved to Warrington. However, she continued to study informally at the Academy, initially under her father and then under Joseph Priestly, after he had taken his position at Warrington in 1762.⁷¹

Barbauld received a good deal of critical acclaim for her poetic works, but she was equally adept working in prose. In 1790, Barbauld anonymously published *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*. In this lengthy tract, written on the failure of Parliament to repeal these Acts, she argued for liberty in broad terms and displayed her patriotic feelings as well as her opposition to religious intolerance, political disenfranchisement and slavery. She showed her support for the French Revolution, claiming that it was English ideas of liberty that had inspired it, proclaiming ‘Go on, generous nation, set the world an example of virtues as you have of talents. Be our model, as we have been yours’.⁷² Throughout

⁶⁹ Claeys, ‘Virtuous Commerce and Free Theology’, p. 142.

⁷⁰ John Aiken junior, ‘An Address to the Dissidents of England on Their Late Defeat’ (London, 1790), p. 18, quoted in *Ibid.* p.142.

⁷¹ O’Brien, *Warrington Academy*, pp. 26, 54, 62, 134; A. Janowitz, *Women Romantic Poets; Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson* (Tavistock, 2004), pp. 7, 18.

⁷² Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (London, 1790).

the address, Barbauld bemoaned the status of English subjects, who were not members of the Established church, especially that of Dissenting Protestants, concluding with:

In this hope we look forward to the period when the name of Dissenter shall no more be heard of than that of Romanist or Episcopalian; when nothing shall be venerable but truth, and nothing valued but utility.⁷³

Maira Ferguson praises Barbauld for her political position, describing her as a radical who demanded ‘constitutional equality for everyone’. However, despite her seemingly radical stance, Barbauld’s published works did not always meet with radical approval. Much of her poetry was aimed at instructing children to behave according to Christian teaching, and her support for liberty did not stretch so far as women’s rights, or strangely, given her own advantages in this area, women’s formal education. Her stance seems to be based upon orthodox Christian perceptions of the family and women’s place within it. This is further evinced by her poem, *The Rights of Woman*, a response to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which she initially seems to concur with Wollstonecraft’s arguments, but concludes by encouraging women to accept their position, urging them to ‘abandon each ambitious thought’.⁷⁴

In 1791, Barbauld published *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade*, which was a poetic attack on plantation conditions, the slave trade, and, of course, on Parliament for failing to abolish it. Opening with ‘Cease, Wilberforce, to urge thy generous aim!’ *Epistle to William Wilberforce* continues by attacking the ‘avarice’ of those who profited from slavery and the ‘sophistry’ of those who argued for its continuance. She offers praise

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *The Rights of Woman* (c. 1795), in M.H. Abrams *et al* (eds), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Sixth Edition, Vol. 2 (London, 1993), p. 864; M. Ferguson, *Subject to Others British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670 – 1834* (London, 1992), pp. 132-3, 190; M. Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture, 1790-1832* (Oxford, 1994), p.221.

to the abolitionists, referring to them as ‘friends of the friendless’ and as a ‘generous band’, but criticises the nation as a whole for abolitionism’s failure to gather enough support. Although Barbauld’s view of African people was that they were the spiritual equal of Europeans, she portrays Africans in *Epistle to William Wilberforce* as innocent, carefree and perhaps naïve. Her depiction of life in Africa is rather idyllic, though perhaps this is a literary trick to juxtapose the happy lot of the African in Africa, with the cruel, inhuman conditions of Africans in the Caribbean. However, she tacitly recognises the orthodox racism amongst her readers and panders to it, warning them of the likelihood of an African backlash should the practice of slavery not be terminated, referring to ‘the vengeance yet to come’, a warning rendered all the more alarming, given events in St. Domingue.⁷⁵

Barbauld’s credentials as a reform activist and abolitionist are confirmed by her continuing friendship with Joseph Priestly, to whom she dedicated a poem in the aftermath of the Church and King riots of 1791, which *The Morning Chronicle* published anonymously in January 1792. Barbauld praises Priestly’s conduct and commitment to the cause of liberty and discusses how this stance had made him vulnerable, referring to his name being the ‘bandied theme of hooting crowds’. In an attack which bears comparison to Thomas Walker’s withering assault on Nonconformist timidity after the Church and King Riots, she criticises the inactivity of Anglicans and those Dissenters who had signed oaths of loyalty to the King and who did not move to protect Priestly and the other victims of these disturbances:

When e’en each reverend Brother keeps aloof,
Eyes the struck deer, and leaves thy naked side

⁷⁵ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave trade* (London, 1791); C. Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London, 1992); p. 32; Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, pp. 160-1.

A mark for power to shoot at.⁷⁶

Barbault concludes by asserting that the country as a whole owed a debt to Priestly for his contribution to the cause of reform and would one day come to recognise his contribution to liberty:

... Well cans't thou afford
To give large credit for that debt of fame
Thy country owes thee. Calm thou cans't consign it
To the slow payment of that distant day,
If distant, when thy name, to freedom's join'd,
Shall meet the thanks of a regenerate land.⁷⁷

Barbault's later work was considerably less contentious, and her fame rests as much with her rather didactic children's verse as it does with her politically motivated work. Nevertheless, her contributions to the philosophical, if not necessarily the political debate, illustrate the concerns of educated middle-class Dissenters in the early years of organised anti-slavery. Their motivation for action can be defined by genuine humanitarian objections to cruelty and frustration with their own religious and political oppression, combined with relatively conservative attitudes to the nature of the family, social order and Christian duty.

The Academy in Warrington was a higher education institution for students from nonconformist backgrounds, who were legally prevented from entering the older universities. It was not an exclusively nonconformist student body, however, and students of Anglican as well as Dissenting backgrounds from merchant families in Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and even from abroad attended the Academy at Warrington.

The Warrington Academy's alumni attest to its importance and influence in academic and reforming spheres and regional connections. In addition to Priestly, the

⁷⁶ Anna Laetitia Barbault, 'To Dr. Priestly, Dec. 29, 1792', in *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbault, with a Memoir by Lucy Aiken*, I (London, 1825), pp. 183-4, first published in *The Morning Chronicle*, 8 Jan 1793.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

political economist and population theorist, Thomas Robert Malthus, naturalist Dr Reinhold Forster, Liverpool historian and abolitionist sympathiser Rev. Dr William Enfield (who was minister at the Renshaw Street chapel where William Roscoe worshipped) and the theologian Dr John Taylor all taught or studied at the institution. The Academy also boasted a number of luminaries from Liverpool amongst its teaching staff, including Gilbert Wakefield, John Holt and Matthew Turner. Warrington's close cultural connections, especially in reformist circles, were attested by the printing of two important early 'Liverpool' publications in the town. These were Enfield's *History of Liverpool* in 1773 and Roscoe's poem, *Mount Pleasant* in 1774. The town's centrality to issues of reform was further evinced by the 1787 publication in Warrington of the radical Thomas Cooper's *Tracts, Ethical, Theological and Political*.⁷⁸

Seymour Drescher refers to Warrington Academy being an 'isolated pocket [where there was] a hint of sustained anti slavery opinion'.⁷⁹ The Academy played host to abolitionist sympathisers, but we should not conclude that opinion on the issue of slavery in the institution was even broadly uniform. The student body at Warrington was not entirely made up of progressive thinkers and the offspring of reformists. There were also rusticated students from Oxford and Cambridge colleges studying at Warrington and former pupils of public schools, sent to the academy as a last resort; these students were perhaps unlikely to be reform sympathisers. Furthermore the sons of West Indian planters, who were unlikely to sympathise with the anti-slavery cause, were also to be found amongst the student body at Warrington.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Cooper is discussed in chapter 3, 'Manchester Abolitionists'.

⁷⁹ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 68.

⁸⁰ Bright, 'A Historic Sketch of Warrington Academy', pp. 21-2.

The Academy was unable to control the behaviour of its students. The only sanction available was expulsion and that would adversely affect the already precarious finances, and it was this shortage of funds that finally brought the downfall of the institution. When these severe financial difficulties along with scandal surrounding drunken high jinks forced the closure of Warrington Academy in 1783, the proceeds of the sale of the property were used to fund the opening of Dissenting academies in Hackney and Manchester, both of which suffered from similar financial problems. The Hackney institution closed in 1796 and the Manchester Academy only survived by moving, first to York, and then to Oxford.⁸¹

The existence of Warrington Academy was an indication of the concentration of religious Dissenters in the immediate area. The prominence of this Nonconformist community was attested by the 1791 meeting held in the town to address the discriminatory problems faced by Nonconformists in the North West. Liverpool's Dissenting community were represented at the meeting amongst others by the (occasionally) prominent abolitionist, Dr James Currie, who expressed concern at the extremity of Thomas Cooper's political positions.⁸²

In addition to the petitions against slavery sent to Parliament in 1823 by abolitionists in Warrington, Manchester and Liverpool, a further six Lancashire towns contributed to the campaign.⁸³ As in Cheshire, settlements in the vicinity of Warrington, such as St. Helens did not organise petitions. Those to the south and east

⁸¹ Baines, *History, Directory, and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, pp. 585-6. M.J. Turner, *Reform and Respectability, The Making of a Middle Class Liberalism in Early 19th-Century Manchester* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 149, 166; S. Marriner, *The Economic and Social Development of Merseyside* (London, 1982), p.87; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 85-6; G. Chandler, *William Roscoe of Liverpool 1753-1831* (London, 1953), pp.xxvii, 65; G. Chandler, *Liverpool* (London, 1957), p.458; Bright, 'A Historical Sketch of Warrington Academy', pp. 22-3; O'Brien, *Warrington Academy*, pp. 85-104 .

⁸² I. Sellers, 'William Roscoe, the Roscoe Circle and Radical Politics in Liverpool, 1787-1807', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 120 (1968), p. 50; Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-slavery*, p.160.

⁸³ Preface to *Substance of The Debate in the House of Commons on the 15th May, 1823 on a Motion for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery*, pp. xxxvii – xxxix.

of Manchester, such as Saddleworth and Oldham and those in Liverpool's orbit, including Prescott and Ormskirk also failed to send petitions. This seems to fit the pattern in Cheshire, where petitions were organised in the larger cultural and commercial centres, but by and large not in the newer industrial settlements. Being situated at a considerable distance from Manchester, Liverpool and Warrington, following a similar pattern to that in Cheshire, the traditional centres of Preston and Lancaster organised petitions. However, three petitions also came from towns immediately to the North of Manchester, one each from Bolton, Rossendale and Rochdale.⁸⁴ This does seem to suggest that local civic identity and abolitionist opinion were strong enough, and that the abolitionists themselves were sufficiently numerous and well organised in these towns to attract significant local support. As stated above, without ascertaining the identities of the petitions' signatories, it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions regarding levels of support for abolitionism at such a micro local level.

We can see that the shared hinterland of Manchester and Liverpool experienced a great deal of economic and political change during the years of organised anti-slavery. This led to traditional centres such as Lancaster and Chester losing much of their influence in the newly industrialised areas, which increasingly looked to the two larger cities at either end of the River Mersey, or Warrington, at the head of the estuary. This reflected a process of change in power relations in the area, which culminated in the reform of Parliament in 1833. The new power brokers were the industrial middle class, who had already assumed the role of the economic and cultural élite in the North West of England. Just as money, trade and influence had gravitated towards Liverpool, Manchester and to a lesser extent, Warrington, it seems

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* pp. xxxviii- xxxix.

that these were the towns that chiefly played host to reform and anti-slavery sympathisers and activities. This is not to say that inhabitants of the smaller settlements in the region were not involved in these issues, but rather that political activism and especially, extra-Parliamentary campaigns followed the same route as the money and the power, tending to become concentrated in the three larger conurbations.

Chapter 7.

The Political Life of Dr Beilby Porteus

Beilby Porteus (1731-1809) was the eighteenth child of nineteen born to Virginia tobacco planters who had returned to England in 1720, settling in York.¹ His political activities are illustrative both of the plurality of political views amongst abolitionists and the diversity of forces motivating their activity. They are also evidence of the social and political influence that the Bishop of Chester was still able to exert across the region and further afield. Porteus' activities demonstrate the connections and links between political activists and reformers in the North West of England and with allies across the country. These links did not just traverse geographical distances, but also crossed political and class divides. This is evinced by Porteus' involvement in the events surrounding the controversial Rev. David Simpson in Macclesfield (discussed below) and his relationship (in printed works) with Edward Rushton. In 1787, Rushton, the impoverished Liverpool abolitionist and radical, dedicated his *West Indian Eclogues* to Porteus. Another indication of Porteus' connections with abolitionists is the fact that the Rev Robert Hodgson, son of leading Liverpool abolitionist Isaac, was the author of his biography in 1811.²

Although he always disavowed the term 'Evangelist', Porteus was nevertheless a distinguished Evangelical Anglican. He actively encouraged the foundation of Sunday Schools in all parishes and was a prominent member and founder of Anglican societies

¹ A. Robinson, 'Porteus, Beilby', in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, 44 (Oxford 2004), p. 977.

² R. Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus, D.D. Late Bishop of London* (London, 1811). Rev. Simpson is discussed in chapter 6 'The context for abolitionism in Liverpool's and Manchester's Shared Hinterland', Rushton's activities are discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

aimed at furthering the influence of the Church of England to improve the behaviour and morals of the populace in accordance with biblical teaching. He was chaplain to George III from 1769, Bishop of Chester from 1776 to 1787 and Bishop of London from 1787 to his death in 1809. Porteus held fairly orthodox views concerning the racial inferiority of African people, and he was by no means a political radical or even a supporter of moderate political reform. However, he was an outspoken opponent of the slave trade. He was also a friend, admirer and supporter of both William Wilberforce and the abolitionist author, Hannah More, the latter of whom he bequeathed £200 in his will.³ His motivation for supporting the abolitionist cause came about through apparently genuine humanitarianism, driven by a desire to promote what he saw as the truth of the Christian doctrine. Prompted by what Howard Temperley refers to as 'Cultural Imperialism', Porteus wished to convert Africans to Christianity, including those in Africa as well as those in the West Indian colonies.⁴ In short, he wanted to share the alleged benefits of Christianity with the rest of the world, on the basis that western, and specifically British, cultural assumptions were somehow in accordance with God's will.

Although Porteus shared some of the nonconformists' missionary zeal and opposition to slavery, he was conservative in his attitude towards them and to Roman Catholics. He recognised Dissenters' and Catholics' basic right to worship and was tolerant of their existence, rather than necessarily supportive of any complaints about discrimination against them. Indeed he supported the Test and Corporation Acts and

³ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 231-2, 256; J. Pollock, *Wilberforce* (London, 1977), pp. 50, 64, 159; J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti Slavery, the Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787 – 1807* (London, 1998), pp. 129-30; Robinson, 'Porteus, Beilby', Matthew and Harrison, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* p. 978.

⁴ H. Temperley, 'Anti-Slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism', in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds) *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), pp. 335-50.

voted in the House of Lords against Catholic Emancipation in 1805.⁵ Regarding Methodism, the preaching of Church of England clergy in (private) Dissenting chapels and the invitations made by some Anglican priests to Methodists to preach in their churches, he asserted in 1779:

I would have every man permitted to worship God ...in the manner he most approves. But then let him be consistent. Let him not halt between two opinions. Let him not vibrate between two modes of worship. Let him not be a Methodist in the morning and a Church-of-England man in the afternoon ... Let him take his part, and adhere to it steadily and uniformly throughout ... In this, I hope, there is nothing like intolerance ... There cannot be a more determined enemy to persecution of every kind, and a more decided friend to toleration than myself ... Indeed, I believe I am generally thought to carry my lenity towards those, who have the misfortune to differ from the Church of England, a little too far.⁶

Here Porteus can be seen to uphold the disciplines and protect the position of the Established Church, recognising and supporting the power and influence it had. However he professes and then chides himself for his own liberalism towards non-members of the Church of England, and claims that providing people held the ‘fundamentals of Christianity’, he would be prepared to consider them as fellow Christians. The phrase, ‘a Methodist in the morning and a Church-of-England man in the afternoon’ would appear at least in part to refer to Rev. David Simpson in Macclesfield, who had strong Wesleyan ties and, after conducting Sunday morning service, would often accompany his Anglican congregation to a Methodist chapel service in the afternoon.⁷

Given his strong religious conviction, which was by no means universal amongst eighteenth-century clergy, bishops included, there is logic to Porteus’ abolitionist stance.

⁵ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 199-208, 269-73; P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-1783* (London, 1989), p. 270.

⁶ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 269-71.

⁷ G. Malmgreen, *Silk Town: Industry and Culture in Macclesfield 1750-1835*, (Hull, 1985), p. 148. This is discussed in Chapter 6, ‘The context for Abolitionism in Liverpool’s and Manchester’s Shared Hinterland’.

He considered that abolition might come about particularly through the intervention of the Church of England. Porteus argued that Christians have a duty to be respectful of other genuine Christians. Therefore, he claimed that if the slave population of the Caribbean and Africans in Africa were to be converted to the faith, then it would be beholden on the civilised world to put an end to the trade in slaves. They should also improve living conditions on the plantations and in time, but only very gradually, when the slaves had been civilised enough to be fit for freedom, do away with the institution of slavery itself.

Porteus' pious paternalistic humanitarianism contrasts with the more commercial arguments put forward by abolitionists elsewhere in the North West. On the surface it seems that Porteus' version of Christian abolitionism had little to do even with Cropper's free trade scheme to reveal 'God's plan' and bring prosperity to all. Broadly speaking Porteus' political alignment was with the contemporary dominant discourse. His political activities were concerned with protecting and furthering the interests of the Church of England and the British ruling class, and with maintaining the power and influence of the British Empire. Porteus' abolitionist arguments would perhaps be more likely to appeal to his own circle: the old order, the aristocrats and mercantile capitalists, adherents to the High Church, those whose power was already established.

In addition to his problems with David Simpson in Macclesfield, Porteus' relationships and connections with other abolitionists are intriguing. There was a tension in the national abolitionist leadership between Thomas Clarkson and the more cautious William Wilberforce. These tensions were also played out at the local level. In Liverpool, for instance, Edward Rushton's strong anti-American slavery stance and broadly radical

politics would have placed him at odds with most of the city's leading abolitionists. It could be argued that Rushton was one of Clarkson's men in Liverpool, certainly not one of Wilberforce's.⁸ Given the bishop's friendship and close working relationship with William Wilberforce, Rushton's choice of Porteus as the dedicatee of *West Indian Eclogues* seems a little incongruous. The differences between Rushton's and Porteus' political stances is illustrated by their relative positions on Thomas Paine's work. Whereas Rushton admired Paine's contribution to the struggle for liberty and only criticised him for not committing fully to the abolition cause in America, Porteus saw the radical author as a dangerous influence. In his role as President of the Society for Enforcing the King's Proclamation against Immorality and Profaneness, Porteus moved to prevent the distribution of Paine's *Age of Reason* in 1795. Underlining his dismissive attitude toward the working class, he argued that the book was:

addressed to the *multitude*, and most dexterously brought down to the level of their understandings. It compressed the whole poison of infidelity into the narrow compass of an essence or an extract, and rendered *irreligion easy* to the meanest capacity.⁹

A further twist to this set of relationships is Porteus' relationship with Samuel Horsely (Bishop of Rochester, then St. David's). Despite his anti-slavery activities, Porteus' friend and ally, Wilberforce, had no such close relationship with Horsley. In 1795, Wilberforce and Horsely crossed swords over the projected site of Jeremy Bentham's Panoptican prison.¹⁰ Two years later, Wilberforce tried to enlist Porteus' help in a dispute with Horsley over access to books in the Westminster library, which were

⁸ Clarkson had specifically sought out Rushton when he visited Liverpool in 1788. This is discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool abolitionists'.

⁹ R. Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, p. 126.

¹⁰ Bentham was a friend and political ally of Wilberforce's.

under the latter's control and which Wilberforce needed for research purposes.¹¹

Horsley's anti-slavery position was considerably more forthright than either

Wilberforce's or Porteus'. This is illustrated by a pamphlet published in support of the boycott of West-Indian sugar:

Which crime is the worst? – 1st. that of stealing men, women and children and selling them? Or 2^{ndly}, that of buying these stolen men &c. And dooming them and their posterity for ever, to a cruel, ... hopeless bondage, ... and to moral and intellectual degradation, ... and death of the soul? Or 3^{rdly}, that of purchasing the produce of their toil, and bribing the men 'stealers', ... by paying them a higher price (two millions annually in bounties &c.) than for the same commodity produced by free labour? Or 4^{thly}, that of partaking of it when bought by another, whom you have denounced as a criminal for so doing? ... May he not justly tremble at the word of God, which threatens ... to take vengeance on all injustice, cruelty and oppression? Does not he who neglects to dissuade all over whom he has influence from making use of the 'accursed thing' *in any form* ... violate the injunction, 'Though shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him?' ... If the consumption of slave-grown sugar, from thoughtlessness, from the fear of man, of being esteemed singular or over scrupulous, or giving offence by virtually condemning others, or from want of self-denial in gratifying the taste, or from wilful ignorance of the actual condition of the slaves, or pretence of it being a political question; will any of these pleas avail before God, when 'judgement shall be laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet?' – *ISAIAH XXVII. 17*¹²

Horsley's broad condemnation leaves his readers with no doubts about their Christian duties, and the consequences, should they fail in them. He accepts no excuses for consuming slave-grown products, underlining his arguments bluntly and emotively. He refers to slave owners and traders as 'men stealers' and slave-grown produce as the 'accursed thing.' This was a view which would cause a great deal of consternation amongst those abolitionists in Wilberforce's camp, who were often keen to adopt overtly moderate public stances to prevent the cause being 'tainted' amongst broader society.

¹¹ J. Pollock, *Wilberforce*, pp. 137-8, 146.

¹² Samuel Horsley, *Questions to Professing Christians on the Use of Slave-Grown Sugar, Coffee, &c.* (Birmingham, c. 1827-8), NMGM, D/CR/12/34.

This is evinced by Wilberforce's letter to James Cropper of 1822, in which he warns Cropper of the dangers of attracting those who may be considered 'obnoxious to public prejudice'. Views such as those expressed by Horsley neatly exemplified those that Wilberforce feared would 'give a tincture to the proceedings'.¹³

As discussed below, until the late 1820s, neither Non-Conformist nor Anglican efforts to convert the slaves to Christianity met with a great deal of success. It appears that Horsley, unlike Porteus, saw Christian duty lying in emancipating the slaves rather than converting them. There is no mention in Horsley's pamphlet of conversion.

However, the quotation from Isaiah resonates with the Old Testament imagery effectively employed in the late 1820s and early 1830s by Nonconformist preachers in the colonies. Their numbers and their popularity with the black population of the British colonies (if not the plantation owners) increased as the slave population became increasingly creolised in the final years of slavery. It would be safe to conclude that Horsley's theological, political and racial views as expressed here were very much at odds with those held by Porteus. However, both bishops worked together in the House of Lords supporting each other's work on anti-slavery issues.¹⁴ Of course, Porteus may not have shared Wilberforce's personal animosity towards Horsley, or perhaps he only joined forces with his fellow bishop in the House of Lords out of political expediency. Clearly, the connections between these abolitionists were far from straightforward. They illustrate the disparate and occasionally opposing set of motivating forces at work within the movement, and the complex overlapping of political interests amongst abolitionists.

¹³ William Wilberforce, personal correspondence to James Cropper, 23 Oct 1822, NMGM, D/CR/4/3. This is discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

¹⁴ J. Jennings, *The Business of abolishing the British Slave Trade, 1783-1807* (London, 1997), p. 74.

With his seat in the House of Lords and close ties to the monarchy, unlike many abolitionists, Porteus was able to participate directly and effectively in mainstream politics. He was active in the House of Lords during the debate about William Dolben's Slave Carrying Bill in 1788, which aimed to curb the over crowding of slave ships. Porteus attended every session at the Lords for the month leading up to the Bill's passing on 10 July. The Dolben Bill was a less steadfast measure than he would have preferred, but Porteus did see it as an important step in the right direction.¹⁵ In common with many early critics of slavery, Porteus argued strongly for an improvement in the slaves' conditions and treatment, whether or not emancipation was achieved. Indeed his support for the emancipation campaign, as discussed below, was lukewarm at best. Conversion to Christianity along with amelioration of the slaves' conditions remained the main focus of his arguments.

Porteus first aired his vision for the Caribbean in a sermon of 1783, delivered to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. James Philips published the sermon in pamphlet form in 1784 for the London Abolition Committee.¹⁶ The sermon was initially aimed at gathering support specifically from the élite amongst the Anglican clergy. In his text, Porteus combines humanitarian appeals for better treatment of the slaves with assertions of the benefits to all concerned once the slaves were converted. At the same time, he panders to perceptions, which we need not doubt he held himself, of the cultural and perhaps racial superiority of white Europeans over black Africans. In an earlier sermon, Porteus referred to Caribbean slaves as 'our fellow labourers of the brute

¹⁵ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 102-3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 86-8; Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade*, p. 30.

creation'.¹⁷ Without the influence of Christian instruction, Porteus argues in his sermon to the Society, the slaves were destined ever to remain in this undeveloped state. Using their physical captivity as an analogy of his perceptions of their 'spiritual captivity' and appealing to his audience's sense of morality, he continues by describing the results of denying the slaves even the most basic Christian education:

The consequence is that they are heathens, not only in their hearts, but in their lives; and, knowing no distinction between vice and virtue, they give themselves up finally to grossest immoralities, without so much as being conscious that they are doing wrong ... It must be a matter of no small surprise, and of the deepest concern, that, excepting a few instances ... no effectual means have yet been put in practice to rescue them out of this spiritual captivity, so much worse than even that temporal one (heavy as it is) to which they are condemned.¹⁸

The Society was a particularly appropriate audience for this sermon as, in common with many other groups within the Anglican Church, it held plantations in the West Indies. Theirs was an estate of two Barbados plantations, held in trust. The bequest by Christopher Codrington, governor of the Leeward Islands, was made in order that a college to educate slaves in medicine, science and religion be established and maintained on the estate.¹⁹ As this had not come to pass, Porteus recommended that the Society fund a 'regular system of religious instruction' for the 300 slaves, who were their property, on their own plantations. Appealing to his audience's sense of cultural superiority, underlining their collective racial and cultural assumptions and never losing sight of the

¹⁷ Beilby Porteus, sermon preached at St. James' Chapel 24 Mar 1782, 'Sermon IX', in R. Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus, D.D. Late Bishop of London*, 6 vols (London, 1823), II, p. 204.

¹⁸ Beilby Porteus, 'Sermon XVII. The Civilization, Improvement, and Conversion of The Negro Slaves in the British West-India Islands Recommended'. Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, February 23, 1783', in Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, II, pp. 396-8.

¹⁹ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 86, 89; S. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 1988), p.112; E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, (1944; reprint, London, 1964), p. 42; C. Duncan Rice 'The Missionary Context of the British Anti-Slavery movement', in J. Walvin, (ed.), *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846* (London, 1982), p. 159; J. Harry Bennet Jr, *The Bondsmen and Bishops: Slavery and Apprenticeship on the Codrington Plantations of Barbados 1710-1838* (Berkely, California, 1958) p. 3-5.

religious priorities, he claimed this would act as an example for the planters to follow.

Porteus once again ties together the notion of the slaves' spiritual salvation and improvements in their conditions:

From the beginnings we may advance by degrees towards the completion of our designs, till our plantation becomes ... a MODEL for all the West India islands to imitate ... a spectacle no less singular in its kind than honourable to us and our religion ... If ever then we hope to make any considerable progress in our benevolent purpose of communicating to our Negroes the benefits and the blessings of religion, we must first give them some of the benefits and the blessings of society and of civil government. We must, as far as is possible ... secure them by fixed laws from injury and insult; must inform their minds, correct their morals, accustom them to the restraints of legal marriage, to the care of a family and the comforts of domestic life; must improve and advance their condition gradually, *as they are able to bear it* ... in the knowledge and practice of Christianity.²⁰

Porteus excuses and rationalises the reasons for the Society having thus far not met its commitments to the specific obligations of Codrington's bequest. He also absolves them of failing to meet their duties, under the terms of their charter, to propagate the gospel amongst the slaves across the Caribbean. Porteus asserts that failure to convert slaves to Christianity was a long-standing problem throughout the British West Indian colonies. He refutes the argument that African people were incapable of receiving or retaining religious knowledge, arguing instead that so few slaves in the British West Indian plantations had been converted to Christianity due to:

accidental and ... *surmountable* causes; to the prejudices formerly entertained by many of the planters against the instruction and conversion of their slaves ... to the very little attention paid to them on the part of government; to the almost total want of laws to protect and encourage them, and to soften in some degree the rigours of their condition; to the necessity ... which the Society itself has hitherto been under of listening to

²⁰ Porteus, 'Sermon XVII', pp. 415 -28.

other claims of a very pressing and important nature; and of employing a large share of its fund ... in providing for the maintenance of public worship in other parts of His Majesty's dominions.²¹

According to this sermon, the Society for Propagating the Gospel could be absolved of any responsibility for the Caribbean slave population's non conversion to Christianity. There were other bodies which had failed to fulfil their duties and the Society was very busy elsewhere. However, now that he had made the situation in the West Indies plain and had provided a solution to a thorny, long-standing problem, he believed that his colleagues had no just reason not to fall in behind his plan. Initially, the Society did seem to be supportive of Porteus' proposals, but were considerably less receptive the following year when he laid before them a formal plan, which he had drawn up to *civilise* and convert the slaves held by them.²² Here Porteus attempts to counter possible objections to his ideas that were based upon protecting the Society's financial interests, or feelings of sympathy with the plight of other plantation owners, by referring to his belief that improving the slaves' conditions would improve their loyalty and productivity. 'What great things may be done', he argues, 'in advancing the present comfort and the future salvation of the Negroes ... without the least injury to the interests of the planter'.²³ The plan identifies the reasons why previous efforts to convert the slaves to Christianity had met with such scant success. Porteus claims that the catechists in the West Indies, though good and pious men, were too poorly paid and lacked the

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 399-400.

²² Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, p. 88. The proposals were published in re-edited form as *An Essay towards A Plan for the More Effectual Civilization and Conversion of the Negro Slaves on the Trust Estate in Barbadoes, Belonging to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (1784, corrected and abridged for publication in 1816), published again in Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, VI, pp. 165-217.

²³ Beilby Porteus, *An Essay towards A Plan for the More Effectual Civilization and Conversion of the Negro Slaves on the Trust Estate in Barbadoes*, in Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, VI, pp. 168-9.

necessary talents to convey religious instruction to ‘dull and uncultivated minds’.²⁴ It is interesting to note that Porteus is arguing for higher salaries for relatively impoverished middle-class clerics, whilst he would never argue for increasing the wages of working-class industrial operatives in England as a spur to improve their performance. Further, Porteus asserts that insufficient time and resources were allotted to the slaves’ instruction and education in religious and other areas.

Illustrating his racist stance once more, Porteus identifies frequent intercourse with slaves from neighbouring plantations and the importation of slaves from Africa or elsewhere in the Caribbean as an obstacle to the successful conversion of the Society’s own slave population. This, Porteus argues, leads to temptations for the Africans to revert to ‘former heathenish principles and savage manners, to which they have always had a strong natural propensity’. Even by Barbadian standards, conditions for the slaves on the Society’s estate were extremely harsh, but Porteus either does not recognise, or chooses to ignore this, asserting that the Society’s treatment of its own slaves was ‘gentle’. Despite this ‘gentle’ treatment, he asserts the slaves were in ‘too abject and depressed and uncivilised a state’ to be ‘fit’ to receive proper religious instruction, or understand its ‘divine truths’. He hints at the potential for disorder amongst the slaves, arguing that proper religious instruction would help prevent any disciplinary problems and that to enable successful religious instruction, their conditions need to be ameliorated. He states that ‘they [the slaves] stand in need of further marks of the Society’s regard and tenderness for them, to conciliate their affections, to invigorate their minds’. In a further expression of his sense of cultural superiority, Porteus bemoans the lack of Christian influence in the lives of the slaves and the poor moral examples set to them by their white

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 173.

managers and overseers, which led to ‘almost unrestricted licentiousness’ of the slaves’ manners. He also attacks the attitude of plantation managers, which allowed the slaves to slip back into their old familiar habits of ‘vice and dissoluteness’, even if they had nominally converted to Christianity.²⁵

In this essay, Porteus criticises the lack of observance of the Sabbath and the practice of Sunday markets and referring to the superior productivity and fidelity of creolised Christianised slaves. He argues that the ‘better’ converts to Christianity should be allowed to work towards their individual manumission. He continues by arguing that, if his plan were to be adopted, then life on the Society’s plantation would be far better. He also seems to advocate buying conversions with kinder treatment. Porteus envisages Anglican ministers acting as ‘Guardians of the Negroes’, protecting the slaves from unjust or excessively severe punishment, which ‘happen from the caprice or passion even of the humanest managers’. In this way, he argues, these ministers would become the spiritual guides, mediators and even friends of the slaves. Making some rather bold and optimistic claims, Porteus asserts that employing clergymen in this way would:

not only effectively secure ... [the slaves] from all oppression, but would attach them to their minister by the firmest bond of affection, and would make them listen with attention and eagerness to the instruction of their best friend and benefactor and the warmth of their gratitude would make full amends for the weakness of their understandings.²⁶

Porteus praises the success enjoyed by the Moravian sect in both converting and educating large numbers of slaves. This success affords him some degree of hope that his own plans will succeed, and if they do, making a final plea to his audience’s compassion, vanity and religious conviction:

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 173-6.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 186-7.

We shall relieve ourselves from the uneasiness of possessing a specimen of property which in its present state cannot but ... give pain to a religious society, but which, with the improvements here proposed, will not only patently accord with our character and our institution, but give fresh credit consequence to both in the eyes of all mankind.²⁷

Despite the moderate stance of his proposals and his sharing of the same values and assumptions as his colleagues in the Society, Porteus' ideas were rejected. After a four hour meeting to discuss Porteus' proposals, they thanked him for 'the great pains and trouble he had taken' but informed him that their circumstances rendered it 'unadvisable' to adopt his plan.²⁸

Porteus would have known that convincing the Society of the correctness of his vision would prove to be a difficult task. He strongly believed that the Society's slaves' physical and spiritual welfare were vulnerable; each of the society's slaves was branded with the word 'society' to distinguish them from slaves belonging to other estates. Further, he claimed the Society's agents in the Caribbean did not even preserve Sundays for the slaves' rest and worship, a situation of which Porteus would heartily disapprove. Throughout his career, Porteus preached and campaigned for measures to ensure that Caribbean slaves and workers in England alike be persuaded (if not forced) to observe the Sabbath.²⁹ The plantations operated on a six-day working week, leaving only Sundays for the slaves to socialise, run their markets and tend their own provision grounds.³⁰

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Society had followed the conventional Anglican

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 188-9.

²⁸ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, p. 88.

²⁹ Further specific examples of this include, Sermon preached at St. James' Chapel 24 Mar 1782, Sermon IX, in Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, II, pp. 201-220; 'A Letter to the Clergy of the Diocese of London on the Protection of the Lord's Day 31 May 1797', in Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, VI, pp. 287-29; Lecture on the Gospel of St. Matthew delivered in the Parish Church of St. James, Westminster, 1 Mar 1799, in Hodgson, *The Works of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, IV, pp. 291-2.

³⁰ D.B. Davis *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca 1967), pp. 244-5; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 42.

line. It preached a constant message to the West Indian planters: that baptism ought not and indeed would not lead to emancipation, but rather would lead to the slaves becoming more diligent in their work and loyal to their masters, therefore becoming more productive and profitable. The planters did not accept this reasoning to any extent. However, in the minds of most adherents to the High Church, the bonds that conversion to Christianity offered to break were apparently only those tying the slaves to Western European notions of sin and, despite the fears of the planters, not those tying them to their masters.³¹

Nevertheless, Porteus was bitterly disappointed by this rejection of his proposals. He claimed that by beginning the conversion of Africans on the plantation that they owned themselves, the Society would firstly show that the slaves' conversion was indeed possible and, secondly, illustrate by which methods this might most successfully be carried out. In the process, the Society would render their name 'illustrious in every part of the world'. This would lead in turn, he believed, to the Society's educational and civilising activities being imitated and gradually taken up by other plantation owners in the Caribbean colonies. He was bemused that a society set up to 'propagate the Gospel in foreign parts' would balk at the opportunity to do so, by so hastily rejecting a plan which they had readily admitted fell within both the 'letter and the spirit of their charter'. He dismissed the society's reasons for not taking up his plan as trivial, arguing that 'nothing less than an absolute demonstrable impossibility' should have discouraged the society from following his proposals.³² His struggle was indeed a very difficult one, and the Society would remain unconvinced by anti-slavery arguments for many years to

³¹ M. Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670 – 1834* (London, 1992), p. 168; Davis *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, pp. 234-5.

³² Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 87-91.

come. In 1830, against growing abolitionist support across the country, they voted to reject a motion that West Indian slavery was contrary to Christian ethics.³³

Converting the slave population was an issue that constantly concerned Porteus and he continued to pursue this project, persuading a number of Anglicans to adopt his view, but the High Church enjoyed considerably less success in this endeavour than did the Nonconformists.³⁴ In 1788, he addressed the Lords, supporting a rather convoluted motion put forward by Lord Bathurst. This asked the King to instruct the Governors of the West Indian colonies to put in place legislation that would guarantee better treatment of the slaves and to provide for their religious instruction. Porteus informed the Lords that in order to promote particularly the second of these measures, he had written a circular letter to the various clergy on the islands, ‘earnestly exhorting them to take the condition of the Negroes in their respective parishes into their consideration, and to instruct them in the principals of the Christian Faith’.³⁵

In 1790, Porteus recognised an opportunity to put forward a further proposal to encourage the better treatment and conversion of the slaves. It revolved around the Bishop of London’s trusteeship of a charitable fund (the profits of an estate at Brafferton in Yorkshire), set up specifically for ‘the advancement of the Christian religion amongst infidels’. The trust was subject to a legal challenge from its former sole beneficiary, The William and Mary College in Virginia. Before the American War of Independence, The William and Mary College had used the money to fund their activities educating and converting to Christianity a small number of Native American children. Upon the outbreak of war, the London bishopric withheld the monies normally paid to the college.

³³ Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, pp. 112, 233.

³⁴ J. Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom 1776-1838* (Basingstoke, 1986), p. 131.

³⁵ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 103-4.

After the war, the college requested that payments be resumed and claimed their arrears, but this request was refused. When Porteus became Bishop of London in 1787, the college renewed its efforts to receive the profits of the Brafferton estates and the arrears owed, which by then amounted to a considerable sum. Porteus questioned whether the college, which was by then in an independent foreign country, was still entitled to the charity's funds. He took the question to the Lord Chancellor, Lord Thurlow. Thurlow decided that the college should be excluded from all benefits from the trust. Importantly, he directed the trustees of the charity to find an alternative use for its funds. It seems that Porteus already had one in mind³⁶

The bishop proposed that the funds should be used to found the 'Society for Conversion and Religious Instruction and Education of the Negro Slaves in the British West India Islands'. Lord Thurlow readily accepted Porteus' proposals and an annual sum of almost £1,000 was allotted to the scheme. Porteus became a very actively involved President of the new society he had founded. He himself selected the biblical extracts that he considered to be most appropriate for the slaves' instruction and level of understanding. He also personally recruited highly qualified ministers to act as missionaries and he kept in regular contact with the missions in the West Indies.³⁷ Despite his best efforts, however, very little progress was made, and Porteus was frustrated by his plan's scant successes. This lack of progress, his biographer tells us, was for the most part due to the planters, who displayed an 'invincible reluctance' to support any measures aimed at providing Christian education of their slaves. It did not, however, prevent Porteus continuing to support his own scheme, even after his death. In his will, he

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 110-14.

³⁷ M. Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (London, 1982), pp. 13-14, 22.

bequeathed the Society for Conversion and Religious Instruction and Education of the Negro Slaves in the British West India Islands £1,000 worth of stocks.³⁸ This is an indication of the genuine importance to Porteus of his interpretation of Christian duty. This drove his political activities. For Porteus, abolishing the slave trade and ameliorating conditions on the plantations were necessary accompaniments to the more important issue as he saw it: the furtherance of the power and influence of Christianity, in the guise of the Church of England and the British Empire.

In large part, the planters and Porteus seemed to be in some agreement about the likely results of converting the slaves: a recognition of their humanity, which would necessarily bring with it a costly improvement in their conditions. They differed in that Porteus believed that this would only lead to an improvement in their treatment and productivity, with emancipation only coming in the distant future. The slave owners feared that the result would be the more immediate necessity of setting the slaves free. In this they concurred with the radical Liverpool abolitionist, Edward Rushton. Rushton illustrates the distance between his and Porteus' abolitionist and broader political aims by stating that 'when man once knows that he is enslaved, the business of emancipation is half performed'.³⁹ For this reason, the planters' reluctance to encourage Christian education can be seen as more than an unwillingness to invest time or resources in improving their slaves' spiritual well being. It was rather a refusal to make the much larger investments which they believed would inevitably follow, creating the conditions which would force them to cease holding slaves, bringing financial ruin upon them. To compound their opposition to the conversion of their property to Christianity, West

³⁸ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 114-6, 258.

³⁹ Edward Rushton, correspondence to George Washington, in B. Hunter, *Forgotten Hero* (Liverpool, 2002), p. 108.

Indian planters were not for the most part convinced by the argument that once converted, the slaves would become either more productive or more loyal to their masters. Given the violence in Haiti, the notion of their slaves gaining any sense of freedom, even in a spiritual sense, was not one which would make the plantocracy feel any more secure. As James Walvin argues, ‘the idea that slaves might share an equality – if only of the soul – was a dangerous one. It was much easier not to have the slaves as co-religionists.’⁴⁰

The issue of baptism and religious instruction for the slaves remained an important area in which abolitionists framed their arguments. This shows not just the relative lack of success enjoyed by both Methodist and Anglican missionaries in the Caribbean up to the 1820s, but also the contemporary importance of being seen to hold the ‘correct’ Christian position, which remained a constant area of contention in the debate about slavery throughout both campaigns. As part of a broad assault on the institution of Caribbean slavery from several different perspectives, abolitionist publications of 1823 were still bemoaning the planters’ reluctance to allow their slaves access to the alleged benefits of Christianity. This was forty years after Porteus’ first sermon to the Society for Propagating the Gospel on the subject. In tracts published in 1823, the slaves are described as suffering under the ‘yoke of ignorance, vice and irreligion’ and having ‘little or no access to the means of Christian instruction’.⁴¹

⁴⁰ J. Walvin, *Black Ivory, A History of British Slavery* (London, 1993), p. 177.

⁴¹ *A Brief View of the Nature and Effects of Negro Slavery, as it Exists in the Colonies of Great Britain* (April 1823); Report from the Committee of the Society for Mitigating and gradually abolishing the State of Slavery throughout the British Dominions (Aug 1823), both published in Preface to *Substance of The Debate in the House of Commons on the 15th May, 1823* (1823; reprinted, London, 1968), pp. xv, xxxvii; M. Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries* (London, 1982), pp. 1-37, 65-101.

Porteus' assumptions and prime concerns give further clues to the forces motivating his abolitionist sympathies. He perceived a need for an improvement in the nation's morals, especially among the new industrial working class and was prominent in a society set up in 1787, 'The Society for enforcing the King's Proclamation against Immorality and Profaneness'. He contributed to efforts to relieve poverty amongst the poor, but was always 'discriminating' in his donations and in tune with contemporary orthodoxy, was keen only to help the 'deserving poor'.⁴² In 1798 Porteus delivered a series of lectures during Lent in which he reminded the rich of their religious obligations and chided them for their 'extreme prodigality, luxury and voluptuousness'. His main concern, however, was to diffuse 'disloyalty and infidelity and wickedness amongst the lower orders'.⁴³ We can see from this that, like his friend Wilberforce, Porteus was no champion of the working class. Both saw industrial operatives as largely unruly, undisciplined and in need of moral correction, but not necessarily requiring or deserving any improvements to their living or working conditions. This was a widely held, though by no means unanimous view amongst middle-class Anglican abolitionists and marks a clear difference in interest between them and their radical or dissenting colleagues as well as providing the cause of much of the tension between differing strands of abolitionism.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, orthodox thinking had it that activities such as drinking, swearing and gambling amongst the labouring classes were not mere vices, but sins, and would inevitably lead to perpetrators becoming irreligious, disorderly and unreliable, less productive employees. This view was common amongst

⁴² Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 255-8, 291-4.

⁴³ *Ibid.* pp. 100, 129-31.

adherents to both the high and low churches.⁴⁴ To address this problem, Parliament passed a series of measures in an attempt to instil discipline and order amongst the workers. In 1788, Porteus (then Bishop of London) piloted one such measure through Parliament himself. It was an attempt to improve the morality, conduct and productivity of the working class, by reinforcing existing laws against Sabbath breaking, ensuring that operatives would return to work on Monday physically and spiritually refreshed.⁴⁵ This measure illustrates another of Porteus' main concerns and reflects his views on issues he considered important at home and in the West Indies. Slaves, like any workers, needed to abide by the correct (Anglican) Christian protocols for their own personal benefit and, equally importantly, to improve their aptitude for work and attitude towards their masters. When the trade in slaves was abolished by Parliament in 1807, Porteus' response provides further evidence of his political standpoint and reveals the forces which drove his support for abolition:

The Act, which has just passed, has at length put a period in this country to the most inhuman and execrable traffic that has ever disgraced the Christian World; and it will reflect immortal honour on the British Parliament and the British Nation ... [the abolition of the slave trade] has been for upwards of four and twenty years the constant object of my thoughts; and it will be a source of the purest and most genuine satisfaction to me ... that I have had some share in promoting, to the utmost of my power, the success of so important and so righteous a measure.⁴⁶

Porteus' sense of patriotism and loyalty to what he perceives as Britain's noble traditions and institutions are clear here. He underlines these sentiments as well as his absolute opposition to the cruelty of slavery, asserting:

⁴⁴ S. Smiles, *Self Help* (London 1859); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), pp. 385-411; P. Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation, An Economic History of Britain*, second edition (London 1983), pp. 186-191; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, pp. 123-33.

⁴⁵ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p. 499.

⁴⁶ Hodgson, *The Life of the Right Reverend Beilby Porteus*, pp. 217-8

It was said by Mr. Pitt that the Slave Trade was the greatest practical evil that ever afflicted the human race, and ... the annihilation of that trade is the greatest practical good that can be conferred on man; and so I firmly believe that it will prove to be. There never was, I am persuaded ... a single instance, in which so great a quantity of evil was ever exterminated from the earth, and so great a quantity of good produced, as by this one act of a British Legislature.⁴⁷

Whilst not disavowing a certain amount of pride in his own part of the abolitionists' success, Porteus is keen to praise the words and deeds of his friends and allies. In addition to citing Pitt, he pays especial tribute to Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce for their contributions to the campaign's success, once again revealing the main thrust of his concerns. He praises Sharp's modesty, humility, learning and piety and applauds him for his 'personal exertions'.⁴⁸ His gushing comments on Wilberforce and his contribution are a prime example of abolitionists framing their arguments in terms of good and evil and taking full advantage of any opportunity to emphasise and perhaps exaggerate the importance of their role in abolishing the trade. They also reveal the closeness of the relationship between Porteus and Wilberforce and of their political views:

Of the conduct of Mr. Wilberforce in the prosecution of this great cause, I cannot express my admiration in adequate terms. The applause he received was such, as was scarcely ever before given to any man sitting in his place in either House of Parliament: but, had it been even greater than it was, he would have deserved it all, for the unceasing efforts, the firm, unshaken, intrepid perseverance, with which he maintained and finally brought to a successful issue, the most glorious battle, that ever was fought by any human being.⁴⁹

In a further illustration of his political stance, Porteus does not miss his chance to attack the French revolutionary government and, by extension, many abolitionists who were supporters of the French Revolution, such as Edward Rushton. He describes the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 220-21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp 218-9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 221-2.

effects of abolishing the trade rather hyperbolically as ‘nothing less than a total change in the condition of one quarter of the habitable globe ... from the lowest abyss of human misery, to ease, to freedom, and to happiness’. Porteus, ignoring his own country’s similar policies in other continents, criticises expansionist French military activity in Europe. He describes in strong terms the hypocrisy of the French government, who had reintroduced slavery into their colonies in 1802 having abolished the institution in 1794. Displaying his Anglo-centric view of Britain and his patriotic fervour once more, he compares the conduct of the two countries:

What a glorious work for this country to have accomplished! And what a contrast is there between the conduct of the common Enemy of mankind, and that of the English government – the former desolating, enslaving and deluging with blood the Continent of Europe – the latter giving liberty, not merely political liberty, but real, substantial personal liberty to the continent of Africa.⁵⁰

Porteus’ views of the effects of British abolition of the slave trade are optimistic, exaggerated and at least very premature. There were still many slaves in captivity in British colonies and many issues of liberty at home in Britain and Ireland. We have already discussed Porteus’ solution to the woes of the British working class, whom like the slaves, he wished to help by bringing them closer to God, but doing very little else to improve their conditions. As far as the slaves on the plantations were concerned, Porteus believed that their emancipation was unachievable as yet, and that campaigns for their freedom were ‘injudicious though benevolent’. He believed that ‘all that was safely attainable, had been attained; and to aim at more would have been imprudent and dangerous’. His preferred course would be to continue gradually to ameliorate conditions on the plantations and to *improve* the slaves’ levels of civilisation. This he proposed to do by ‘habituating them gradually to milder treatment; and above all, by impressing deeply

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 219-20.

upon their minds the precepts and the doctrines of the Gospel'.⁵¹ Here we can see very stark contrasts with the considerably more forthright anti-slavery views of his contemporaries, Edward Rushton and Bishop Samuel Horsley. Porteus' response to Britain's ending of the slave trade reveal a great deal about his religious, political and moral preoccupations. Whilst his humanitarianism appears to be genuine, if somewhat condescending, his motives for supporting abolition seem to be based upon a furtherance of his patriotic objectives and those that he perceived God to have, which to his mind were one and the same thing. This is an example of the 'cultural imperialism' amongst abolitionists' to which Howard Temperley refers: the imposition on African people of the values and assumptions of the western cultural élite. These values and assumptions were based upon supposedly universal (Christian) laws, which in turn governed human progress. They were also obviously alien to the supposed beneficiaries of this kind of Christian expansionism.⁵² It appears that Porteus did not recognise that these values and assumptions were by no means fixed and were in fact in a state of flux during his political career.

We can clearly see stark differences between Porteus' abolitionist motivation and that of many of his allies in the campaign across the North West of England and further afield. However, his extreme gradualism can be compared to others in the Anglican clergy. We find an echo of Porteus' concerns in 1824, when Rev. Richard Bickell, who argued for an improvement in the slaves' conditions, wrote an article about his observations in Jamaica. He was concerned that slaves were being forced to work on Sundays, arguing that by not working on the Sabbath, 'man is cheered and invigorated,

⁵¹ *Ibid.* pp. 223-4.

⁵² Temperley, 'Anti-Slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism', pp. 348-9.

and goes to his labour with a willing mind'. Another of the concerns of the article is the excessive number of floggings carried out on the plantations. In making his case for abolishing the use of the whip, Bickell describes in emotive terms the 'cruel' practices of certain female members of the plantocracy 'who would point out to a driver or some flogging assistant [which] females were to be flogged in their naked state'. However, in the same article, Bickell seems to destroy his credibility in bizarre fashion, describing the awful effects of flogging on its victims by relating an account of an incident involving a slave servant of his in Jamaica. It is interesting to note that Bickell himself ordered the slave to flogged:

I desired he might be given only two dozen [strokes]. Though he richly deserved the flogging, yet I was sorry to see him when he returned; for he crept and rolled about the yard for some time, crying aloud, and was so much marked, that he could scarcely sit or walk for several days.⁵³

Notwithstanding the admission of cruelty to his own slave, Bickell's article echoes and supports many of Porteus' concerns and priorities. It also illustrates the lack of success that Christian reformers enjoyed in convincing the planters to allow their slaves to have access to religious instruction. With their common backgrounds in the Church of England, it should come as no surprise that Porteus and Bickell framed their arguments in such a similar fashion. We might also expect differences between these public positions and those adopted by secular, capitalist abolitionists. However it is possible to detect a certain number of abolitionists uniting in a common cause, setting aside differences in other areas.

⁵³ Richaed Bickell, 'The West Indies as they are; or a Real Picture of Slavery but More Particularly as it Exists in the Island of Jamaica' (1824), published in *The Christian Observer*, Mar 1825, NMGM D/CR/12/20.

Although their activities were separated by a number of years and were therefore carried out in very different contexts, and from disparate positions, perhaps the contrast between the conservative, religious arguments adopted by Porteus and those of activists, such as James Cropper, was not so stark after all. Whilst Cropper's more forthright anti-slavery arguments were in large part commercially based, it could be argued, as Cropper himself did, that his motivation was driven as much by his religious as by his economic convictions. In any case, Cropper's arguments asserted that free trade, free labour and increased prosperity for all were closely tied to God's intentions for the world.

Similarly, though his anti-slavery stance was more moderate, Porteus believed it to be his Christian duty to convert, *civilise* and regulate the lower orders, be they the white English working class, or the Caribbean plantation slaves. In the case of the slaves, having thus improved their spiritual well being, it would then be beholden on their owners gradually to allow them increased access to the benefits of civilisation. This would lead eventually, though only very slowly, to emancipation, once they had achieved an appropriate level of civilisation. Porteus also appealed to his audience's economic interests and their fear of insurrection, arguing that the slaves' loyalty and productivity would increase, if they were allowed proper religious instruction and their conditions were ameliorated. We can perhaps see some of the same broad motivating forces at work in the arguments put forward by both Cropper and Porteus, despite their differing religious backgrounds and political positions. For both men, opposition to slavery formed part of a broader political and religious stance, which reflected disparate and often opposing concerns and interests. Similarly, for both men, motivation for abolitionist activity was the product of a combination of diverse forces. Whatever the divergence of

the forces and interests that drove Cropper's and Porteus' abolitionist activities, it seems that the main differences between the arguments publicly forwarded by them lie in the perceived concerns of their respective audiences, rather than their differing political and religious backgrounds, opinions and aspirations.

In this light, we can perhaps see how Porteus' contemporary, the radical Liverpoolian abolitionist, Edward Rushton came to choose him as the dedicatee of his anti-slavery poem, *West Indian Eclogues*.⁵⁴ Rushton's political awareness would surely have been sufficient for him to realise that, by most political measures, Porteus was no kind of ally. However, if Rushton wished his anti-slavery views to gain a wider audience than his own political orbit, dedicating his poem to such a prominent and well-connected member of the political and religious hierarchy would be an intelligent and perhaps effective measure to take. Recognition of Porteus' contribution to what would in all likelihood have been their sole common cause was Rushton's stated reason for dedicating *West Indian Eclogues* to him. On the other hand, Porteus did not express any opinion of Rushton's work, or recognition of his status as its dedicatee. We may be safe in concluding that Porteus would not have found it a particularly agreeable poem, as it depicted Africans as articulate, intelligent and capable of heroism, which was a view that was a long way away from his own racist assumptions.

Porteus' sense of patriotism would also have been affronted by the *Eclogues*' less than favourable descriptions of Britain's role in the world. However, because of the centrality of abolition to the largely opposing political aspirations of both Rushton and Porteus, in the context of abolitionism their stark political differences were of less importance than the common aim. This would have been rendered more so in the minds

⁵⁴ This is discussed in chapter 2, 'Liverpool Abolitionists'.

of each, due to them both believing (both erroneously as it turned out) that the abolition of the slave trade would further their own political interests. This was not so much a case of uniting under a common cause. It was more a case that each man was confident that his own broader political cause was being served by abolitionism, while the other's aims were being thwarted.

The political life of Dr Beilby Porteus was intertwined with his religious convictions and his professional clerical career. He strongly believed that God's will was that the British Empire should prosper, and that it was the Empire's duty was to *civilise* and Christianise the non-European world. As a consequence of this, converted peoples would be due the benefits of adhering to the correct Christian lifestyle. To Porteus this meant abolishing the slave trade and improving the conditions on the plantations.

Whilst his position on the slave trade and slavery set him apart from many in the political and religious élite, the forces, which motivated his political activities, including his abolitionism, were very similar. They stem from a desire to promote and protect the interests of the established political, economic and religious élite. It is a feature of the complex web of forces motivating slave abolitionists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that their anti-slavery activism formed part of often opposing broader political and economic aspirations. The relationships and links between Porteus and his contemporaries seem very incongruous, but are merely illustrative of the sophistication of the political debates taking place during this period.

They also indicate the occasionally disingenuous political expediency employed by activists on all sides of the debate. We can see that Porteus' motivation for abolitionism was driven by religious and political considerations. In a broader context,

his first hand experience in the North West of England of the changing economic landscape and the growing strength of Nonconformist sects provided evidence to Porteus that the established political and religious order was under threat. Much of his political activity was directed at protecting the élite from this threat, by campaigning for citizens of all social classes to adhere to their traditional Christian duties. By following the correct conventions of diligence and loyalty to their masters, the lower orders would pose no threat to status quo. By setting good examples of proper behaviour and allowing their servants and employees access to correct religious instruction, the ruling classes would protect themselves from the potential of any threat of disorder. To meet this end, it would be incumbent on those in control to recognise some minimum level of rights, even for slaves on the plantations, as a form of reward for conversion and obedience.

Slave abolitionism often formed part of the (occasionally revolutionary) free-trade ideology, which for a time purported to serve the interests of both the new manufacturing middle class and their working-class employees. Conversely, Porteus' motivation came from a perceived need to spread God's word through the medium of the British Empire and a desire to protect those who currently controlled it, the British political élite.

Chapter 8.

Conclusion

The British campaigns against the slave trade and the institution of slavery took place against a background of industrialisation, which brought with it increasing urbanisation and a change in power relations. The region examined in this study was of particular importance for three reasons. It was at the centre of the movement of slaves and slave-grown produce; it played a similarly central role in driving the campaigns against slavery; and it was also at the centre of Britain's industrial growth in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Liverpool's and Manchester's shared Cheshire, South Lancashire and North Wales hinterland for the most part quickly fell under the authority of two cities becoming less influenced by the traditional centres of Chester and Warrington. The locality contributed a great deal to the port activities of one and the industrial manufacturing activities of the other.

The city of Liverpool was the dominant port of the triangular trade from the middle of the eighteenth century to the end of legal slave trading in 1807. Its neighbouring city, Manchester, was the dominant centre of the world's cotton industry and therefore at the hub of Britain's Industrial Revolution. As discussed in this study, it would certainly be erroneous to ascribe Liverpool's growth entirely to its connections to the slave system, but its centrality to the triangular trade was still of considerable significance to the city's growth. That Manchester's rise was due to its involvement with one of the great slave-grown staples, cotton, and its increasingly mechanised processing cannot be questioned. For these reasons, the two cities and their shared hinterland with

their changing political, economic and social structures, provide an effective geographical focus for a study such as this. An examination of the strategies and tactics employed by anti-slavery activists in this region against the backdrop of the emergence of industrial capitalism provides a revealing picture of the motivating forces at work. It would be too stark and rather too simple to tie pro-slavery forces to established mercantile capitalism and abolitionism to the rise of industrial capitalism. However, it is nevertheless a reasonable position from which to attempt to gain an understanding of the forces at work which motivated the abolitionist movement. Further, it provides a context for the complex relationships that existed between protagonists on both sides, or perhaps more accurately, given the diversity of views expressed by the individuals examined in this study, all sides of the slavery debate.

It seems clear from the evidence considered here that existing polarised theories of economic decline and economic suicide do not provide sufficiently coherent or complete explanations for activists' involvement in the abolition and emancipation campaigns. These accounts may only be justified if we accept that key protagonists were acting directly against their own interests, or that a large number of influential and experienced financiers and merchants were simultaneously misreading the economic outlook of the slavery and plantation systems. Roger Anstey's argument that it was the rising power of humanitarian Nonconformists along with the reform of Parliament, rather than the rise of industrial capitalism that created the conditions for the abolitionists may also be seen to be a little flawed.¹ If we can accept that it was the rise of industrial capitalism that led to the increase in power for religious Nonconformists, and that the

¹ R. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London, 1975); R. Anstey, 'Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics, 1829-1833', *Slavery and Abolition*, 2 (1981), pp. 211-226.

reform of Parliament reflected the growing economic power of the new industrial middle class, then it would be safe to conclude that the growth of industrial capitalism went hand in hand with political and economic reform agitation. The conditions which Anstey claimed allowed abolitionists to achieve success were to a great extent dependent upon the growth of industrial capitalism and the decline of the old order's power.

That protection of interests was a major concern to abolitionists is evinced by the selectivity of the causes that they chose to support. This is illustrated by the various stances adopted by, for example, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Beilby Porteus, Thomas Walker and Thomas Cooper, who each argued from different broad political and religious positions. However, we can also see examples of genuine humanitarianism on the part of abolitionists considered in this study. For instance, James Cropper tied his commercial, religious and commercial ideas together, and more especially Edward Rushton, who seemed to be concerned only with achieving liberty for all people. This is a further illustration of the complexity and diversity of motivating factors for abolitionist campaigners and supporters. It suggests that it would be difficult, and very probably inadvisable, to attempt to account for the success of abolitionism with a single simple, all encompassing explanation.

The public debate in Liverpool between James Cropper and John Gladstone suggests that the abolition campaigns were successful, at least in part because they appealed to the perceived economic self-interest of the increasingly powerful industrial middle class, by adhering with varying degrees of deliberate intent to their *laissez-faire* ideology. An examination of the vibrant reform activity in Manchester provides similar evidence of

anti-slavery achieving success through appeals to the new orthodox ideology, as well as to genuine humanitarian ideas of liberty.

Many, though by no means all reformers and abolitionists in both campaigns were from middle-class, Dissenting backgrounds. This was certainly the case in Liverpool, Manchester and their shared hinterland. The Roscoe circle, who were largely responsible for leading the campaign against the slave trade in Liverpool, were for the most part from Nonconformists sects, though there were a number of Anglican adherents and clergy involved. In the emancipation campaign, it was a Quaker merchant, James Cropper, who led the Liverpool movement and played a central role in the national campaign.

Manchester was a renowned centre of reform and anti-slavery in the 1780s and early 1790s. Although the local leader was an Anglican, anti-free trader, Thomas Walker, much of the cause's support came from Nonconformist adherents to *laissez-faire* economic thinking in the city. Manchester's centrality in the early campaigns can be ascribed to a combination of forces, but the high concentration of industrial middle-class Dissenters in the city seems to be the most influential of these.² The contribution that they made to reform issues ought not to be discounted, despite Thomas Walker's accusations of 'timidity', and their ideological motives need to be recognised. Their only forums for political activity existed outside of the mainstream arenas, and Dissenting reformists acquitted themselves well where they were active. They were able to take advantage of their elevated local positions and national connections to make public arguments in support of their various causes. E.P. Thompson argues:

² E.M. Hunt, 'The Anti-Slavery Trade Agitation in Manchester', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 79 (1977), pp. 46-72; S. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilisation in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 67-73.

Their attachment to civil liberties went hand in hand with their attachment to the dogmas of free trade. They contributed a good deal – and especially in the 1770s and 1780s – to forms of extra-parliamentary agitation and pressure-group politics which anticipate the pattern of middle-class politics of the nineteenth century.³

In this light we can see how certain strands of slave abolitionism evolved along with industrial capitalism and its attendant philosophy of *laissez-faire*. Importantly, it also developed alongside other religious, political and economic reform issues. Indeed, David Turley describes abolitionism in Manchester as ‘one element of an impressive culture of reform’.⁴ These reform issues seemed in large part to be aimed at improving the lot of disenfranchised middle-class manufacturers and merchants. In this light, it is clear that abolitionism was for some activists an extension of their ideology. It may be fair to accuse them of seeking to protect their own positions to some extent, although, it would be unreasonable to expect them to have knowingly acted directly against their own interests.

The anti-slavery campaigns were characterised by the strong links between activists across the country, which crossed class and cultural divides. Although prominent, active abolitionists were not exclusively from Nonconformist backgrounds; many of these connections can in large part be ascribed to the existing, almost self-supporting networks of Dissenting groups, most especially The Society of Friends. These groups of reasonably well educated, concerned individuals were politically disempowered to some extent, but were becoming increasingly economically powerful. With the growth of Dissenting Academies, activists were increasingly well educated and capable of expressing complex and convincing arguments to support their various causes. The exclusion of Nonconformists from the traditional local and national spheres of

³ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), p. 57.

⁴ D. Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-slavery, 1780-1860* (London, 1991), p. 118.

power, prior to the reform of Parliament, became increasingly incongruous, as their commercial success along with their intellectual and philosophical pursuits elevated them on a local level at least to élite positions within society. It is interesting to see how religious and political differences between abolitionists were set aside to a great extent, as activists worked together to ascertain and then pursue their common objectives. This contrasts with issues in which no consensus existed, such as education or extension of the political franchise.

Abolitionists reached decisions on what these common objectives would be by finding banners under which they all could fight. Hence the initial campaign focused on challenging the trade in slaves, rather than the institution itself. This focus inevitably led to a blurring and diluting of abolitionist aspirations. This is a further illustration of the diverse motivating forces that drove the activists, which in turn reflect the multiple, overlapping and occasionally opposing interests of those protagonists involved. There were tensions within the anti-slavery movement, based upon combinations of personal, religious and political differences. The campaigns included some strange bedfellows. We have seen that Thomas Cooper's radicalism caused concern amongst moderate abolitionists in the region. To further complicate this picture, it seems that Cooper's radicalism had a somewhat changeable nature, as it was authority to which he most vehemently objected. His support for *laissez-faire* economic policies waxed and waned in response to the prevailing economic and political conditions. He argued in favour of free trade in Manchester during the period of loyalist, protectionist control. In America, he argued for trade tariffs to protect the interests of the disempowered southern states, only to change tack once again and campaign for free trade, when he perceived high duties to

be benefiting the industrial North at the agricultural South's expense. Having framed his opposition to slavery in typically strident terms, his position on this issue was subject to similar forces. He wished to protect the oppressed southern states from the exploitation of those in the powerful and industrialised North, even if that meant protecting the institution of slavery. Even though it was being abolished in British colonies, he defended it as necessary and just in the American context.⁵

If we can accept Cooper's extremely fluid positions as an exception, there were still a number of anti-slavery activists, whose positions on questions other than slavery created the potential for political friction. Examples include Bishop Samuel Horsley, who was a critic of both the moderate Wilberforce and the radical Priestly. We can see that Edward Rushton's steadfast, proto-socialist stance set him apart from his less committed Liverpoolian contemporaries, from whom he refused help when he was experiencing financial difficulties. The Anglican Thomas Walker's strong opposition to free trade placed him at odds with most of his Dissenting Mancunian colleagues, whom he then bitterly and publicly berated for their timidity in the aftermath of the Church and King riots. However, this did not prevent Manchester abolitionists from taking the local, and some would argue national, lead in the early campaign against the slave trade. Bishop Beilby Porteus' disciplinarian, anti-reform position made him an ally of Wilberforce, but his stance on most political questions made him an opponent of the vast majority of abolitionists in the North West of England. Even so Rushton dedicated his *West Indian Eclogues* to the bishop.

⁵ S.L. Newman, 'Cooper, Thomas' in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison (eds), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography From the Earliest Times to the year 2000*, 13 (Oxford, 2004), p. 281. This is discussed in chapter 6, 'Manchester Abolitionists'.

Across the North West of England, the alliances and tensions within abolitionist circles are a reflection of these same trends in the country at large. The close economic and social ties between many abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates in an area made a considerable contribution to the blurring and fudging of the issues. It seems that abolition did not divide communities to the extent that we have been led to believe by the abolitionists themselves and by contemporary historians. Republican revolutionary Edward Rushton's relationships with local and national abolitionists illustrate these tensions and seemingly incongruous alliances quite well. He was overtly principled and would not dilute his arguments. He criticised those who were not as committed as he to ideas of liberty for all, including such luminaries as George Washington and Thomas Paine. Nevertheless, he dedicated his *West Indian Eclogues* to a pillar of the establishment, Bishop of London and erstwhile Bishop of Chester, Beilby Porteus, who was by no means a radical, or even a reformer. Porteus' commitment to liberty did not extend beyond abolishing the trade in slaves and gradually ameliorating the conditions the Caribbean slaves. That too was to come at the price of the conversion of the slaves to Christianity. The potential for political enmity between Rushton and Porteus is illustrated by their opposing views concerning the notion of European racial and cultural superiority, their reception of Thomas Paine's published work and their polar opposite perceptions of the nature of the British Empire.

Referring to the effects of the debate about slavery on social relations in his adopted home city in 1788, Dr James Currie, the Liverpool-based abolitionist, wrote that 'the struggle between interest and humanity has made great havock [*sic*] in the happiness

of many families'.⁶ However, whilst it is clear that many abolitionists framed their arguments in this way, as a battle between good and evil, in reality the debate was a matter of interest versus interest, or perhaps more accurately, a struggle between sets of perceived interests. As far as supporters of slavery were concerned, the debate was perhaps bizarrely one between the selfish interest of the abolitionists and the benign humanity of the traders and planters. They argued that the majority of planters were caring and compassionate in their dealings with slaves and that they were responsible for raising the poor Africans to a level nearer to their white masters.⁷ There is perhaps a kernel of truth in pro-slavery advocates' arguments that abolitionists were attempting to further their own interests at the expense of the country at large. Their opponents were convinced that the commercial arguments for abolition put forward by campaigners such as Isaac Hodgson and James Cropper in Liverpool would benefit only a few British merchants and damage Britain's economy by making foreign, slave-produced staples more competitive. This furtherance of self-interest amongst reformers is also found amongst the more strictly humanitarian abolitionist sympathisers, the more radical and perhaps more principled activists, as well as members of Parliament with abolitionist sympathies. These activists' stances were set within a framework of broader theological or ideological objectives. Abolition was just one part of a set of interlocked religious or political aspirations.⁸

⁶ B. Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (London, 1984), p. 24.

⁷ Hugh Crow, *Memoirs of the Late Hugh Crow of Liverpool, Comprising a Narrative of his life Together with Sketches of the Western Coast of Africa Particularly of Bonny, the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, the Production of the Soil, and the Trading of the Country. To Which are Added Anecdotes and Observations Illustrative of the Negro Character* (1830; reprint, London, 1970), pp. 41-2, 132-3, 175-7.

⁸ G.M. Ditchfield, 'Repeal, Abolition, and Reform: A Study in the Interaction of Reforming Movements in the Parliament of 1790-6', in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds) *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in*

The various anti-slavery stances adopted by Rushton, Porteus and James Cropper all illustrate this merging of interests. Rushton's abolitionist stance was clearly part of his wider revolutionary proto-socialist egalitarian view. Porteus, the dedicatee of Rushton's *Eclogues*, saw improved conditions for the slaves and their very gradual emancipation as part of a broader swathe of moralising, *civilising* measures which were also applicable to British labourers. Improving the moral and spiritual conditions of the lower orders (be they black or white), as well as their living conditions was of primary concern to Porteus for much of his clerical and political career. Similarly, Cropper's concerns were with revealing God's plan, which seemingly revolved around the free trade of Lancashire cotton goods. Cropper argued that this would ultimately bring prosperity and liberty to all, with the apparent exception of the slaves on the American cotton plantations. However, Cropper blurred his views on the position of American slaves to make his arguments more acceptable to his audience. We have seen that he covertly agitated for abolition in the United States, at the same time as he omitted arguments for American slave emancipation from his published works.

In each of the above cases, support for the abolitionist cause reflected and was shaped by a broader set of political, economic or religious objectives. This illustrates the broad array of motives for anti-slavery activity but also suggests that a unified explanation of slave abolition in Britain is likely to remain elusive.

Liverpool's centrality in the later campaigns is beyond question. The city played host to a very active Anti-Slavery society, which enjoyed considerable autonomy and status. It also formed a Ladies Association, which though it did not match Birmingham's

Memory of Roger Anstey (Folkestone, 1980), pp. 101-118; J. Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776 - 1838* (Basingstoke, 1986), p. 109.

in terms of membership, still carried out much of the leg work for the campaigns. From the evidence considered in chapter two of this study, we can see that current explanations of the level of activity and effectiveness of Liverpoolian abolitionists in the campaign against the slave trade are not satisfactory. It is inaccurate to state that there was minimal activity in the city, and it would not be safe to conclude that activity was in any way analogous to that in other areas.⁹ There was a detectable swell of anti-slavery support in Liverpool in the 1780s, but this support manifested itself in a singular way. Liverpool in its response was not like any other town in the country.

The influence of James Cropper has been examined to varying degrees by historians.¹⁰ Those who recognise his prominence do not agree on the effectiveness of his contribution, nor do they agree about his primary motivation for abolitionist activity. We may believe that Cropper, and others who employed similar commercial arguments, were protecting and promoting their own economic interests. Alternatively, we might conclude that Cropper's commercial argument masked his genuine humanitarianism. Further, it is also possible to conclude that the two concerns happened to coincide, without having any direct relationship to each other.¹¹ It is this final explanation that perhaps has most credibility. Cropper, in common with many protagonists in this period, made complex and sophisticated arguments, which reflected his diverse commercial, political and religious concerns. It would not be impossible for him to combine these concerns in his

⁹ J. Tripp, 'Liverpool Movement for the Abolition', *Journal of Negro History*, 13 (1928), pp. 265-85, cited in F.E. Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', in R. Anstey and P.E.H. Hair (eds), *Liverpool, The African Slave Trade and Abolition* (Liverpool, 1989), p.197.

¹⁰ This is discussed in chapter 4, 'James Cropper's Rise to Prominence'.

¹¹ E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, (1944; reprint, London, 1964), p. 187; L. J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833* (New York, 1928), pp. 435-6; D.B. Davis, Introduction to R. Anstey, 'Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics, 1829-1833', *Slavery and Abolition*, 2 (1981), p. 210.

world view; indeed, it seems highly unlikely that he would not do so. We are liable to render our conclusions to be inaccurate and flawed, if we consider one strand of Cropper's, or any other activist's activity in isolation.

It is possible to see Cropper's public fudging of slavery in the United States as an example of his making a commercial argument to achieve a humanitarian aim. Had he condemned American cotton plantations in the same way as he did British Caribbean sugar plantations, threatening to interrupt the supply of or even boycott American cotton, then he would be unlikely to appeal to his industrial middle-class audience. His position can also be seen as an attempt to use the free-trade, free-labour argument to benefit his East Indian enterprises, but since he had nothing to gain from the emancipation of American slaves, he was not about to expend any energy in fighting their cause. Neither of these explanations is satisfactory, however, if we consider his covert transatlantic abolitionist activities and his merchant activities in America and the East Indies alongside his anti-slavery and philanthropic activities in Britain.

Perhaps we would be safer concluding that humanitarianism, religious conviction and economic perceptions were separate, but interconnected and related strands that made up the motivating factors for individual abolitionists' activities. To argue otherwise would be to ascribe protagonists in the slavery debate with the capacity only to react to stimuli in one-dimensional ways. This would seem an unreasonable conclusion to draw about people who held relatively complicated political positions, made sophisticated arguments and were prolific in their output of propaganda. Cropper's concurrent mercantile, religious and political activities suggest his economic interests and the ideology that he perceived to protect and promote them were important considerations for

him, but not more so than his adherence to religious duty, or his commitment to humanitarian and philanthropic causes. Free labour, free trade and national prosperity were all part of 'God's Plan', as he saw it.

It is important to recognise that we need to exercise some caution in ascribing motives for abolitionist activity to specific factors outlined in published materials. The stances adopted in propaganda do not necessarily exactly describe those of the author, but perhaps more likely reflect the perceived interests of the audience. Motivation for abolition was multi-stranded and diverse in origin, and anti-slavery sentiments would form only part of any given protagonist's outlook. Therefore, we might be safer to contextualise abolitionists' activities, outpourings and tactics. Again, Cropper provides us with an illustrative example. His mercantile and abolitionist activities were carried out concurrently, and occasionally his arguments would appear to be in opposition to each other. He followed his instinct in activities in both fields, without paying too much attention to any contradictions that these activities presented. This is illustrated by his boycott campaign of West Indian sugar and advocacy of using free-grown produce, in order to put pressure on the planters. He did this at the same time as publicly stating that the cotton produced by slaves in the United States ought not to be boycotted because it would cause further and unnecessary hardship to slaves on the American mainland. This is compounded by his public ambivalence toward and even tolerance of slavery in the United States, when at the same time as he was in a fairly clandestine fashion working with American abolitionists.

Beilby Porteus's stance is similarly coloured by pragmatic compromises when examined in any kind of depth. He displayed moderate public arguments on the slavery

question but his views on the French revolutionary government were more extreme, exposing his patriotism and bluntly racist position. A comparison of different abolitionist positions illustrates that there were three broad areas of motivation for anti-slavery activity: the commercial, the religious and the liberty arguments. Abolitionists from all strands claimed to be acting from humanitarian concerns and framed arguments that appealed to the perceived concerns of their audience. We can see this even in Rushton's case. He stuck to a 'liberty for all' platform and allowed no room in his arguments for pecuniary interests or racist sentiments. His position contained no contradictions within his overall radical view. Nevertheless, he dedicated his first and most famous anti-slavery publication, *West Indian Eclogues*, to the very conservative and anti-libertarian Porteus. This may be seen as an attempt to use the bishop's fame, social position and strong connections in the ruling political class to gain a broader audience for his work. Whilst this certainly does not indicate any approval of Porteus' gradualist and racist abolitionist stance on Rushton's part, it is nevertheless recognition of the bishop's power and usefulness to the cause.

Many of the cases considered in this study demonstrate the attraction of reform and anti-slavery causes to members of the educated Nonconformist middle class. They also show the importance of the region to these causes. Even when there were ostensibly humanitarian motives, the protection of ideological and economic interest was rarely far from the surface. The anti-slavery movement also tended to form part of a broad swathe of reforming causes for this emerging group. It was not necessarily the most important component to the protagonists involved. The case of Thomas Cooper is particularly illustrative. His opposition to slavery and to protectionist economics formed part of his

opposition to authority, rather than his aversion to oppression. Anna Laetitia Barbauld's views on racial and religious discrimination seem to indicate that her stance was considerably more principled and reliable. However, she did not appear to view the oppression of women as part of the same problem. Women's oppression could be addressed, she argued, through adherence to the correct Christian values, and there was no need to provide a formal education or extend the franchise to them. Whereas her friend and mentor, Joseph Priestly, would no doubt have concurred with this, Cooper certainly would not, at least whilst he was a resident in the region. Priestly's attitudes, too, were subject to change. He did not perform the same *volte face* as Cooper, but rather became more committed to policies to achieve liberty for all, eventually to his own great cost.

Aiken, Barbauld and Priestly (and, for a time, Cooper) all believed that the rising English middle class held the answer to the nation's problems and the key to future prosperity. Furthering their interests would, in time, bring an end to religious and economic oppression. To this end, they all argued, with varying degrees of consistency, for the ideology of *laissez-faire*. We can see some justification for Williams' assertion that the mantra for reformists in the region was not necessarily 'liberty' but 'free trade'. However, once again, it appears that Williams is guilty of at least over-simplifying the case. The issue of free trade and its analogous partner, free religion, certainly played a part in motivating the activists considered in this thesis, but do not tell the whole story. The cases of Thomas Walker, Beilby Porteus and to an extent, Edward Rushton show us that anti-slavery sentiments were not necessarily accompanied by adherence to *laissez-faire* philosophy. We have seen in this study that the question of abolition and the broader

issues of reform were framed in a number of diverse ways and that in the case of eighteenth-century anti-slavery, the only unifying force was an opposition to the trade in slaves. Despite the diverse and numerous connections between protagonists, no single world view encompassed the opinions of opponents to slavery. Indeed, opposition to slavery could itself be jettisoned, if circumstances dictated, as in the case of Cooper.

From this discussion, it appears that the connections between abolitionists in the North West of England to some extent followed the same pattern of informal friendship links. Brian Refford has also noted this tendency with Liverpool slave traders.¹² Indeed, we might conclude that effective links in most political campaigns, commercial ventures and religious organisations were liable to follow this pattern. In this light, the strange bedfellows that the slavery debate created do not seem so incongruous. Common interest tends to pull parties together. Whatever their position on slavery and other reform issues, the interests of middle-class activists certainly tended to coincide. This was the case, whether they were arguing from a conservative protectionist, or emancipatory free-trade perspective. In spite of their diverse positions, for the most part protagonists on all sides seemed to claim that their own perspective was the one which best protected and promoted British overseas influence, assured economic well being at home and, importantly, reflected God's will.

¹² B. Refford, 'Merchant Friends and the Social Construction of the Mid Eighteenth-Century Liverpool Slave Trade', paper delivered at *Port Cities: British Society & Maritime Culture* conference, Regional History Centre UWE Bristol, 17 Sep 2005.

ABBREVIATIONS

NMGM	Nation Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
JRULM	John Rylands University Library, Manchester
RP	Rathbone Papers

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